

OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN **A**RMED  
FORCES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR  
1939-45

INDIA AND THE WAR

*General Editor*

BISHESHWAR PRASAD, D. LITT.

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# INDIA AND THE WAR

BISHESHWAR PRASAD, D. LITT.

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*TO ALL WHO SERVED*



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## PREFACE

The general history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War was planned to appear in 17 volumes divided into three series: the Campaigns in the Western Theatre, the Campaigns in the Eastern Theatre and the activities relating to the organization and administration. One of these volumes which did not come strictly under any of these heads was to deal with and summarise the overall participation of India in the Second World War and study it in the general setting of national and international developments. The first sixteen volumes have already been published. The present one is the seventeenth and the last in the series. It gives a bird's-eye view of the war as a whole and brings out in brief the strategic aspects of the campaigns and the part played by India in winning the war as also her efforts in the administrative, economic and industrial fields for organizing the country's manpower and material resources. This is based, in so far as matter relating to India is concerned, almost entirely on our own volumes previously published. For a detailed study therefore of any aspect of the war and India's part in it, a reference should be made to the particular volume dealing with the subject. A complete list of all the seventeen volumes is, for this purpose, given on the back of the dust cover.

In addition to these seventeen volumes, there are seven volumes dealing with medical aspects of the Second World War, prepared by the medical sub-section of the Historical Section. Thus with the publication of the present work the assignment undertaken by the Historical Section has been completed. It is indeed gratifying that a task of such magnitude and complex nature has been brought to completion, and I thank all my erstwhile colleagues including those in the medical and cartographic sub-sections for their unstinted cooperation and devoted effort which alone have made possible the fruition of this project. In this connection I have particularly to mention the assistance rendered by Dr. S.N. Prasad and Shri P.N. Khera, who not only wrote some of the volumes, but have also helped me in editing the volumes and seeing them through the press even when the Combined Inter-Services Historical Section had ceased to exist.

The present volume has been piloted through the press by Shri P. N. Khera, Narrator. I am grateful to him for his assistance which has been of considerable value to me. I am also thankful to Shri K. M. L. Saxena and Shri A. R. Nanda for seeing the proofs of this volume and preparing the Index, and to Shri T. D. Sharma and Shri Karora Singh for preparing the maps.

In conclusion, I must acknowledge the support and encouragement I have received from the Ministry of Defence of India.

New Delhi,  
January, 1966.

BISHESHWAR PRASAD

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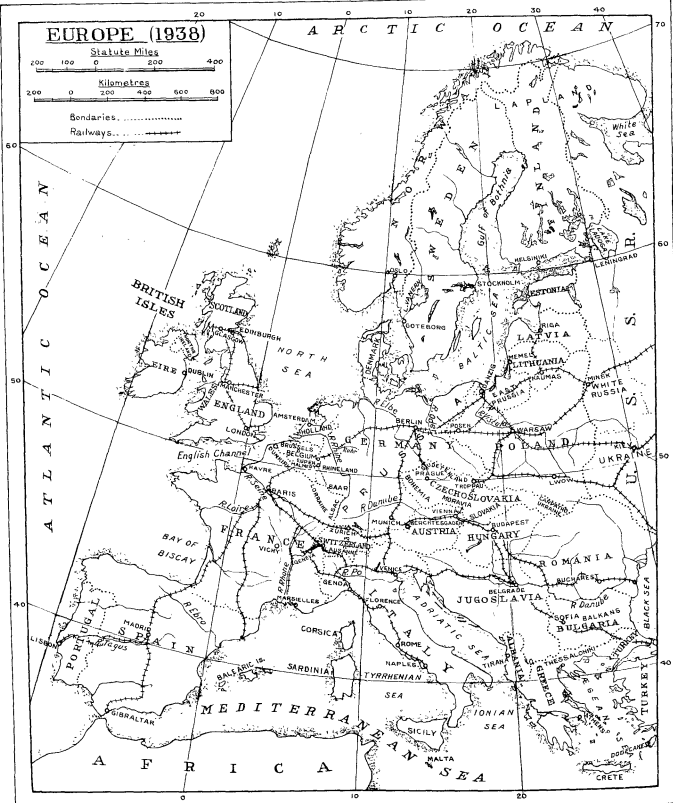
# EUROPE (1938)

Statute Miles  
200 100 0 200 400

Kilometres  
200 0 200 400 600 800

Boundaries.....

Railways.....



## CHAPTER I

# The Genesis of War

The first Great War ended in 1918, and barely twenty years of peace had elapsed when a second World War ensued and encompassed within its scope every part of the civilised world. The two decades of peace also, in their turn, were not years of unbroken calm and friendly international collaboration. Europe was reft by national rivalries and ideological divisions. The arrangement of Versailles had sown the dragon's teeth which were bound to germinate and grow into potential causes of war. The statesmen assembled at the capital of Louis XIV were flushed with a sense of victory and attempted to create a new world which would be free from such elements as had brought forth the huge conflagration of 1914. The victor Powers had invoked the principle of 'world free from war' and on that basis had sought support for their cause. The ideal of a League of Nations settling international disputes by discussion, mediation or arbitration was held up before the war-weary people. The 'Fourteen Principles', so emphatically enumerated by President Wilson, had dazzled the common man who was hoping to see the birth of a new humanity which would be free from the fear of war and the dead-weight of mounting armaments which deprived him of his bread and happiness. The people of Europe, even those of Asia and Africa, had welcomed this approach, and the Wilson ideology found its echoes in the vanquished states also, where people had lost enthusiasm for war and were dreaming of better days despite defeat of their armies and the overthrow of their rulers. Victory of the Allies was greatly facilitated by the growth of this psychology. But the terms of the treaties with the defeated Central Powers belied these expectations, and though an international organisation was established and launched on its career of pacific resolution of disputes, its effectiveness was greatly limited by the frustrations, distrusting and animosities which came to be the necessary concomitants of the Peace of Versailles.

The Peace Conference and its main architects, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, were convinced of the war guilt of Germany and resolved to punish her and so weaken her as to make it impossible for her to threaten the security of Western Europe or pose a danger to British supremacy of the Atlantic. They desired, therefore, to turn back the flow of history, and decided on the atomisation of the political structure east of the Rhine and to

prune the German and Hapsburg Empires of their accretions in the last century. Reduced Germany and Austria were hedged in by new states of Poland and Czechoslovakia which were created out of the ruins of the three central and eastern empires and set up as a counter balance to them. The Treaty of Versailles with Germany provided for the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France; cession of Eupen and Malmédy to Belgium; part of Troppau to Czechoslovakia; Posen and West Prussia, the so-called Corridor, to Poland; and Memel, Danzig and the overseas colonies to the League of Nations, to be disposed of as it thought best. Memel was given to Lithuania, Danzig made into a free city and the colonies were turned into mandated territories to be appropriated by the United Kingdom and the victor Powers. In addition, Germany had to cede the coal mines of the Saar to France "in full and absolute possession" for fifteen years, and the administration of the district was made over to the League of Nations "in the capacity of trustee". To the loss of territory was added the humiliation of the dissolution of the General Staff, the reduction of army and navy to the barest minimum necessary for police functions, occupation of the Rhineland and the payment of reparations for the loss suffered by the victor nations. Germany had to accept her responsibility "for causing all loss and damage to which the Allies and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies". She was required to pay for all damage suffered by civilians besides other losses, and a Reparation Commission was appointed to determine her liabilities which she had to discharge within a period of thirty years. Moreover, she was to pay 20 billion gold marks before 1 May 1921 "to enable the Allied and Associated Powers, to proceed at once to the restoration of their industrial and economic life". To France she had to deliver coal and to the United Kingdom her ships "ton for ton and class for class", to compensate for the loss inflicted by her submarines. These definite items of reparations were enough by themselves to cripple German economy, but to these were added larger sums by the Reparations Commission, whose ceilings were not prescribed.

The Treaty was thus contrived to reduce Germany to the position of a minor Power, shorn of military strength and deprived of financial resources and industrial potential, so that she might not ever dare to wage an aggressive war. Fear and vindictiveness had dictated these harsh terms, and the new German government was expected to be, in the words of Erzberger, "our own executioners." While to Lloyd George it was "a stern but just treaty" Marshal Foch considered it merely "an armistice for twenty years". The Treaty of Versailles and its companion

treaties of St. Germain and Trianon, signed with Austria and Hungary, respectively, which also imposed heavy sacrifices of territory and honour by these two nations, were ill calculated to bring, what General Smuts called, "the promise of the new life," and were no better than truces to be broken when the German people had recovered from the blow and had found a leader who would revive their hopes, raise self-confidence and kindle the spirit of revenge.

The war had provided stimulus to the principle of self-determination of nations, which was so vociferously enunciated at the time. The reorganisation of central and south-eastern Europe had proceeded on that basis. The subject peoples of the world also grew aware of this talisman and pitched their hopes on the realisation of their freedom with the goodwill of their rulers. Asia and Africa were swept by the wave of liberty, and national movements for economic, social and political emancipation of the colonies and dependencies became strong. The sentiment against imperialism, which was assumed to be the prime cause of war, was fortified by the Revolution in Russia whose war cry was unity of the workers of the world and which raised its sword against inequality, colonialism and exploitation. Anti-imperialist national movements of Asia and Africa took up the new slogans and were greatly activated. But while Germany was deprived of her colonies in Africa and the Turkish Sultan had to roll back his empire in the Levant and Arabia, the two great empires of France and the United Kingdom had continued to dominate their overseas possessions to which new additions were made by the peace settlements. The old Russian Empire had been dissolved and in its place a Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics was established comprising as its component parts the possessions of Czarist Russia in Asia and Europe. But in the east, Japan had not only stuck on to Korea, Formosa and Manchuria, but had acquired new islands in the Pacific and a degree of control over China, whose revolution had brought no internal peace or unity. In India, nationalism had found a new weapon in non-violent non-cooperation or civil disobedience to strike at the empire of Great Britain and thereby secure her freedom. South-East Asia was simmering with hatred for the French, Dutch or British empires which had kept those lands under their strict dominion. But neither the League of Nations nor the principle of national self-determination had helped to bring relief to the poverty-stricken, unfree peoples of south Asia or Africa. Empires had not disappeared, yet Germany had lost its colonies, and Italian ambition for African empire had found no encouragement. Japan's appetite for expansion had been whetted by her gains;



and China in her weakness and South-East Asia in its struggle for freedom offered tempting fields for exploitation by her.

The League of Nations had an auspicious start; but soon weakness to achieve its object had become apparent. One of the prominent factors was the non-association of the United States and Soviet Russia (for some years) and the exclusion of Germany in the early stages. Another important factor was the desire of France to seek security of her diplomatic interests, not through this international organisation but by forming alliances with the European Powers, independently of the League. Then the warmth between France and the United Kingdom which had prevailed through the period of war and the peace treaties had begun to cool, and the former ceased to depend for safety on the friendly support of the latter. The first decade of peace also witnessed the exuberant ambitions of the new states for expansion and aggrandisement at the cost of their neighbours. Italy was smarting under the feeling of being left out in the grab for profits by the European Concert, and looked with avidity on the African territories and the Albanian coast as fields for the satisfaction of her imperial aspirations. Germany was suffering from economic disintegration and burning with rage at her national humiliation. Soviet Russia, because of her ideologies, was looked upon with fear and distrust, and was for some time a diplomatic outcast. In the east, Japan was steadily building up her position of preponderance and posing a threat to the security of her neighbours. The dependent nations were chafing under the bonds of slavery and gnashing at the leash which held them to the Imperial Powers. The situation, thus, had grown inauspicious for the success of the League of Nations, and by 1930, the initial enthusiasm for it had begun to cool.

Nor was the economic situation helpful for the existence of mutual cooperation and international collaboration. The Depression, which engulfed the world in 1930, "destroyed the illusion of the post-war settlement and created conditions which led directly" to developments like "Japanese Manchukuo, Nazi Germany, Fascist Ethiopia, Fascist Spain, and the Second World War."<sup>1</sup> Depression caused a reversion in every land to economic nationalism as expressed in high tariff walls, self-sufficiency and territorial grab. The Peace Settlement brought a boom to the victor nations, but economic injury to the vanquished. With the end of the war and removal of restrictions and rationing, there was a spurt of spending and growth of new enterprises. "Fortunes were made by trades and industries" and new markets

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1. Chambers, *The Age of Conflict*, p. 393.

were created. But it was "a boom rather of prices than of production", and when the war-time savings had been spent, the relapse was inevitable. "By the end of 1920 the post-war boom was at an end; prices in every part of the trading world had begun to decline. The nations of Europe, victors and vanquished, were soon floundering in a sea of unbalanced budgets, chaotic exchanges, and unemployment."<sup>2</sup> This situation was aggravated by the chain of reparations and indebtedness which were an important part of the Peace Settlement. The Reparations Commission, despite German protests of the impracticability of payment, and despite the scaling down of the total demand from 269 billion to 226 billion gold marks, between July 1920 and January 1921, had finally assessed the reparation figure at 132 billion gold marks. This exaction was impossible of realisation and naturally Germany defaulted. This brought forth the occupation of the Ruhr by the French and Belgian troops, as a punitive measure. This step worsened Germany's economic plight and contributed, on the one hand, to the depreciation of the mark which touched the limit of 25 billion to a dollar, contributing to tremendous inflation and, on the other, to Hitler's Munich *putsch* and the emergence of the National Socialists into the politics of the country. However, two steps taken at the time helped to improve the situation and save Germany for the moment from the clutches of extremism, whether of the right or the left. The first was the formation of a centre party government under Wilhelm Marx with Gustav Stresemann as Foreign Minister. He took bold steps to restore currency, balance the budget and retrieve financial stability. The second was the Dawes Plan by the Reparations Commission fixing the limit of annual payment by Germany and provision of international loan to meet her obligations. Reaction was not prevented but its pace was halted and, with Hindenberg as President and Gustav Stresemann as the main force in the government, till 1930, no crises were in evidence.

While the vanquished were labouring under the heavy strain of victor's demands, the latter themselves had no easy or continued prosperity. The war had enmeshed them "in a network of indebtedness", the national debts rising manifold to great heights. These obligations had to be met and in that process economic ruin of many of them was inherent. Ralfour Note of 1922 was a pledge of British Government to forego its claim of reparations and inter-allied debts, "provided that this renunciation formed part of a general plan by which this great problem could be dealt with as a whole and find a satisfactory solution". But this pious wish could find no response in the United States; and beyond finding agreements among some of the nations of Europe, no

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2. Chambers, *The Age of Conflict*, p. 394.

settlement was effected of the inter-allied debts, which continued to be paid with all the adverse effects on the economy of the world. Inability to pay debts by surplus of exports compelled most of them to make payments in gold, which helped to concentrate the supply of the yellow metal in the United States. The result of this was fall of prices in Europe and reduction of purchasing power with increasing demand for gold to meet obligations. Its inevitable concomitant was restriction of imports and rising tariffs, both for revenue purposes as well as to attain economic self-sufficiency. This brought forth "economic egotism" and "perfervid nationalism, partly idealistic, partly military", which required protection of key industries. Tariffs were raised in France, Italy, Germany, Danubian States and the United States. Even Great Britain relinquished free trade. National self-sufficiency became the guiding principle as in it alone was there any prospect of "strength and immunity". The Utopian ideal of the removal of economic barriers among the members of the world community was dead now.

By the end of the third decade of the century, gold had flowed into two countries, United States and France, and half of the supply of the world of this precious metal was concentrated there. A number of States in Europe had backed their currencies by making them convertible into gold. Any unsettlement in the value of the latter was bound to shake the stability of the former. Another consequence of the surplus of gold with these richer nations was abnormal lending, prompting unusual spending by the backward nations on municipal amenities and other unproductive expenditures. Germany got easy loans to pay the reparations to Britain and France, who in their turn paid their war debts to the United States with it. And for some time prosperity was evident everywhere. The World Economic Conference of Geneva in May 1927 sought to stabilise these conditions. Also, in 1929, the Young Plan was adopted for arriving at a final settlement of the reparations. The total German liability was fixed at 150 billion marks to be paid in fifty-nine graduated annuities. This arrangement was resented in Germany, particularly as "an intolerable visitation of the iniquities of Versailles on guiltless generations yet unborn", and a persistent reminder of was guilt.<sup>3</sup> The German Government ratified it, as a means of securing the evacuation of the Rhineland, but the Young Plan afforded another weapon in the armoury of the Nazis to strengthen their hold over the German people.

Meanwhile, as a result of unlimited speculation in the United States, there was a sudden crash in Wall Street, heralding the

3. Chambers, p. 402.

commencement of the Depression which had very injurious effects both on the economics and politics of the states all over the world. The United States suffered a financial crash with the drop in prices and production, and unemployment became a major problem. Its effect on Europe was felt later and gradually. International trade declined and prices and production fell bringing forth unemployment in their wake. Crisis was most evident in Central Europe, and Austria was the first to suffer from it. The Credit-Anstalt failed in Austria, and with it the entire financial fabric of the Middle Danubian States became shaky. Help from the various sources was proffered to restore it; but once the confidence is shaken it leads to a general financial ruin. Soon Germany was in distress and many business houses and insurance firms became bankrupt. Reparations were inevitably to be in default. President Hindenberg's appeal to President Hoover brought forth a moratorium on debts for a year. But such expedience could not halt the progress of the malady. Even England became vulnerable, leading to change in government, suspension of gold standard and drop in the value of the pound. England's predicament found a response throughout Europe and the British Commonwealth, where most of the states went off the gold standard. Japan also could not escape it. Even France did not remain unshaken; and unemployment was a serious problem to be tackled everywhere.

In this state of depression, financial crisis, and general decline in economic conditions, it was impossible that reparations should continue to be paid. The Young Plan had become defunct, and Germany had no alternative but to repudiate reparations. On 9 January 1932, the German Chancellor announced that "The situation in Germany makes the continuation of political payments impossible, and any attempt to uphold the political debt system would lead Germany and the world to disaster." Ultimately the reparations were abolished by the Lausanne Convention of 9 July 1932. However, the problem of inter-allied debts did not find an immediate solution, and by 1934 all the debtor states had defaulted. Thus came to an end that major unjust and unwise stipulation of the Peace Settlement which had been devised to perpetuate the bondage of the vanquished Powers and which had produced a false sense of prosperity among the victor nations. The Depression, which was an inevitable consequence of the post-war economic developments, was not without serious effects on international politics. The emergence of the Nazis into power, the initiation of the idea of Austro-German Anschluss and Japanese invasion of Manchukuo were the immediate results of it; and these paved the way for the Second World War. The Allied Powers ignored the writing on the wall and, by their failure to assist the liberal German government and modify the rigours

of the Peace of Versailles, forced the German people into the arms of Hitler and his Nazi hordes.

The rise of Adolf Hitler to supreme position in Germany and his adoration by the people were a symptom of the reaction against Versailles and a concrete expression of the humiliation and resentment of a proud nation. When the war was over in 1918, and Hitler had recovered from his wounds, he lived in Munich and became a member and soon a leader of the German Workers' Party, whose name was changed to National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1920. This and similar other organisations "were then trying to eke out a little dignity and fellowship and a little vicarious revenge for their country's humiliations."<sup>4</sup> The Ruhr crisis gave it strength and the Munich Putsch of Hitler established it on firm foundations. The economic crises, the occupation of the Rhineland and the vindictiveness and intransigence of successive French governments brought further additions to the ranks of the party, though it was not till 1929 that it emerged into prominence. The Depression affected Germany, resulting in the bankruptcy of 15,000 business houses and the unbalancing of the Reich debt. These conditions found vent in fierce outbreaks of party conflicts. Also the Young Plan was opposed by the nationalists and Nazis who demanded a referendum on it. Though the Reichstag ratified the Plan by a majority of two votes, the problem of reparations had convulsed the nation and contributed to the further growth of the Nazis. Gustav Stresemann's death in October 1928 removed the only obstacle to extremism and brought to an end "the peace and progress of the Locarno era". The "parties of discontent" now became popular and the Nazis exploited economic recession to their advantage. The strength of the party had gone up from 27,000 in 1925 to 178,000 in 1929, though their numerical strength was not reflected in their membership of the Reichstag. It was, however, impossible for either Muller or Brüning, the two Chancellors, to rule without emergency decrees.

In September 1930 came elections and the Nazis got one-sixth of the total votes and 10% seats in the Reichstag. This new accession of strength converted them into a mighty opposition, and economic forces made for their further popularity. It became impossible for Brüning to conduct government, and he was dismissed on 30 May 1932. Meanwhile fresh elections in April for the States Diets had brought Nazis in large numbers. Outside too, the party was gaining in membership so that in January 1933 it rose to 900,000, largely recruited from the ranks of the lower middle classes. The Chancellors of Schleicher and von Papen

4. Chambers, p. 446.

brought no respite and ultimately Hindenberg appointed Hitler as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. And Hitler and his followers lost no time in entrenching themselves everywhere, and dominating the entire machinery of administration, economy and social relationships. A process of re-armament was started, and Germany made a bid under Nazi leadership to recover her honour and position of pre-eminence in the world. Dictatorship inside and expansionism abroad were the two principles of Hitler's conduct; and both these found full support in the international situation of the time. "Nazism began as a movement of revolt against the defeat of 1918 and against the national miseries. Its aims included the restoration of national pride and dignity, the repair of the bankrupt economic order, the replacement of the weak democratic Republic by a strong authoritarian leadership".<sup>5</sup> Racial purity and military preparedness were the guiding principles of Nazi policy. The real power in the German Republic lay with the army, and Hitler soon won its support even by the sacrifice of his own irregular semi-military units. Rearmament was adopted with vigour and the Versailles restraints were easily swept away. In the next five years Hitler devoted his energies to economic and military rearmament, and by 1937 was fully equipped "to utilize the great machine in the fulfilment of that wider programme for the conquest of *Lebensraum* which had been consciously envisaged ever since the National Socialist Party had come into existence."<sup>6</sup>

The new dispensation in Germany was not without its reaction in the attitudes and policies of her European neighbours. The entire Versailles system was based on the continued imbecility of Germany, hence her emergence into strength, military and industrial, created a sensation of fear, verging on panic. The spectre of Greater Reich made Austria, Czechoslovakia and other Middle Europe states nervous because of the German minorities among them. In the case of Poland, her existence had been conceived on her perennial antagonism with Germany, and it was on that basis that Franco-Polish Alliance had been formed in 1921. But Poland had many unresolved disputes with Germany. The problem of the Corridor and the question of Danzig were permanent irritants for Germany. Soviet Union also reoriented her foreign policy to get out of the isolation which had resulted from the nature of its constitution. Between 1931 and 1934, the Soviet Government entered into a Non-Aggression Pact with France, made similar bilateral agreements with Italy, and finally entered the League of Nations as a member. France tried to create a network of pacts and alliances to hedge in Germany. The Balkan and Baltic Pacts were followed by mutual assistance pacts

5. Chambers, p. 464.

6. Wheeler Bennett, *Munich*, p. 12.

with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, and the Franco-Italian Agreement. The anti-German attitude of France was evident in all these diplomatic arrangements.

In Britain, however, opinion in regard to the rise of Nazis was divided. While there were some who viewed with sympathy German desire for the revision of Versailles settlement and were prepared to allow parity in armaments to Germany, there were others who viewed with apprehension the formation of a strong totalitarian German state in the centre of Europe. Economic conditions, ideological clinging for peace and desire for disarmament prevented strengthening of the military might of the United Kingdom. The governments of Ramsay Macdonald, Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain were, therefore, prepared to accommodate Hitler and followed a foreign policy which has been derisively termed as that of appeasement.

The year 1935 marked the end of an era of peace and heralded the prelude to war. Fascist Italy under Mussolini had been preparing for expansion and imperial dominion, her eye being directed towards Africa in the south and the Balkans in the east. The Duce exploited the Wal Wal incident to declare war on Ethiopia and defied the League of Nations which imposed ineffective sanctions against Italy. The Ethiopian incident had succeeded the Manchukuo affair, the aggressor in the Far East being Japan. The League of Nations in either case had failed to protect the weak victim and thereby exhibited its impotence to curb aggression and maintain world peace. Now, Hitler also geared national activity to redress the Versailles wrongs and secure territorial expansion to realise the dream of *Mitteleuropa* and *Drang Nach Osten*. The conscription decree, Saar plebiscite and march into the demilitarised Rhineland were all indications of the restoration of national prestige and precursors of Austrian Anschluss and the conquest of Czechoslovakia which were not long delayed. In the unpreparedness of the United Kingdom and diplomatic coolness between her and France, as well as the ineffectiveness of Franco-Soviet Assistance Pact and the ambiguous attitude of Poland, German designs on the two immediate neighbours found no check. It was reported that on 5 November 1937, Hitler summoned a conference of his lieutenants and outlined the future policy of expansion. He told them that nothing would be "gained from a long period of peace" and the future of the Deutsche lay "where the greatest possible conquest could be made at the lowest cost". The objective was "the immediate consolidation of the Greater German Reich; and expansion into Central Europe, where Germany could derive food supplies, raw material

and man-power, to furnish further military excursions to the eastward to Poland and the rich black land of the Ukraine. Austria and Czechoslovakia must, therefore, be subjected as a preliminary to wider conquest". This was the blue-print for the conquest of "agriculturally useful space" which was implemented in the next few years.

The small Austrian state created in 1919 had been unable to maintain either political or economic stability, and, with nine provincial Diets, four political parties and "irregular bands of squadrists" like Heinwehr, her integrity was in serious doubt. There was a definite trend towards rightism. Nazi party was growing in strength and had a close alliance with the parent party in Germany. The situation assumed the gravity of a crisis with the Depression of 1929, for Austria was the first European state to suffer from it. In 1931, an Austro-German Customs Union was proposed to tide over the economic crisis; and in that was inherent the conception of Anschluss with Germany. But Dollfuss and Schussnigg succeeded for a time to avert it, and in their policies showed antagonism to Nazism, presumably secure in the confidence of support from England and France. Dollfuss did not live long and was the victim of a Nazi *putsch*. The reaction which it provoked in the Chancelleries of Europe made the Nazis to lie low for a time. However, in 1936, Hitler forced an agreement on Austria to bring about a "permanent settlement" of the problems outstanding between the two neighbours. This compact brought a new status to the Austrian Nazi party whose cooperation was to be sought in assuming political responsibility. The next two years witnessed increasing prestige for the Nazis and Hitler's preparation for aggression in Austria. The massing of German troops on the frontier, Nazi demonstrations in the country, inclusion of Seyss-Inquart in the government and Schussnigg's threat of a plebiscite precipitated the final collapse of Austrian independence. Hitler's interview with Schussnigg at Berchtesgaden on 12 February 1938 was the precursor of the tragedy; for the Austrian Chancellor had been given the alternative of Nazi control over the government and German domination of the army or a military invasion. Schussnigg's equivocal compliance brought forth the invasion and, on 12 March, Austria was part of the German Reich. Thus was the first step taken towards expansion in the east.

The next to follow was the incorporation of predominantly German inhabited Sudetan province of Czechoslovakia. That state was a creation of Versailles, to act as a "bulwark against German expansion into the Middle Danube". The Republic had great strategic importance owing to its situation, and with its fortifications and munition production had become an important arch of the



Franco-Soviet alliance structure. But this instrument of the Western Powers was riddled with a serious minority problem, for the state, despite its industrial potential and natural wealth, had been formed of heterogeneous and centrifugal elements. These proved to be its undoing. The most important of these was a large German minority (3 million out of a total population of 15 million) which was settled in the Sudetanland. The desire of Nazi Germany to bring them within its fold was reciprocated by their equal keenness to join the Fatherland. A strong Nazi party soon developed there and Konrad Henlein obtained its leadership. His party, called the Sudetan German Party, secured 44 seats in the Czech legislature in 1935; and after the death of Masaryk, the great architect of Czechoslovakia, Henlein drew closer to Hitler, whom he met in 1936. However, events moved with great rapidity after the Austrian Anschluss in 1938, when Henlein put forth his Karlsbad Programme, "demanding autonomy for the Sudetan areas, reparation for injustices inflicted on Sudetan Germans to profess German political philosophy".<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Hitler was discussing plans for the eventual occupation of Czechoslovakia by resorting to invasion. May seemed to be destined for a crisis and Hodza government ordered partial mobilisation and manning of the frontier fortresses. Nothing happened at this show of prowess. But neither France nor Britain, nor even the Soviet Union, was then in a mood or position to stand in glittering armour behind their little ally. French and British Governments were then seriously inclined to a policy of appeasement, largely because of their military unpreparedness, climate for peace among their intellectuals and moral decline in France. This attitude was soon reflected in their handling of the Sudetan problem. Lord Runciman's mission for mediation between the Sudetans and the Benes government proved fruitless, except for the readiness of the Czech government to offer regional autonomy to the Sudetan Germans. Henlein was irreconcilable and negotiations had no prospect of success. The Nazi press, meanwhile, was indulging in the propaganda of frightful atrocities and mass genocide committed on the Sudetan Germans. Then in September, Hitler vehemently denounced the oppression of three million Germans by a foreign Power and proclaimed "if these tortured souls cannot obtain rights and help by themselves, they can obtain them from us." This was followed by riots, to suppress which martial law was imposed in several areas. Negotiations ended and Henlein fled to Germany to lead the Sudetans "home to the Reich".

Active violent intervention of Germany was imminent and Goering was contemplating a long victorious war. Western

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7. Chambers, p. 622.

Europe could not remain indifferent to these cataclysmic events. Sir Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, devoted to the interests of peace, sought a meeting with Hitler, which was arranged for 15 September at Berchtesgaden. The result was the acceptance of the principle of self-determination and the subsequent Anglo-French Plan, asking Czech government to transfer such Sudetan areas to Germany as had more than half of German population and to accept Anglo-French guarantee for the remaining territory. This transfer was to be determined by plebiscite conducted by an international commission. But this submission by Chamberlain failed to resolve the issue for Hitler would have no mention of plebiscites and commissions as a preliminary to transfer. Also Hungary and Poland laid claims to Czech territory which Hitler undertook to uphold. The Fuhrer wanted transfer to be effected before 28 September, which was extended to 1 October. The British Prime Minister went back with this Godesberg Memorandum, almost an ultimatum. The Czech government was not prepared to yield, but Benes was clearly informed by Britain and France that he could expect no help from those quarters and would be wholly responsible for the war and destruction that would follow rejection of the compromise. However, Hodza resigned and General Syrový formed a government of "national concentration" and ordered general mobilization. The crisis was deepening. Soviet Union was prepared to fulfil its obligations towards Czechoslovakia and warned Poland against aggression in that country. British and French General staff held consultations, and the French government ordered mobilisation of two categories of reservists. The war seemed imminent. Hitler's speech of 26 September clearly demonstrated his determination to have Sudetanland. And two days later British navy was mobilized, despite Chamberlain's agony at the nation being called upon to dig trenches and put on gas masks "because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing". The clash of arms was ultimately prevented by Mussolini's appeal to Hitler to postpone his march for twentyfour hours. His efforts on the other side led to the Four Power Conference at Munich on 29 September, and the signing of the Munich Agreement the next morning on the lines of the Godesberg Memorandum. Within ten days beginning from 1 October, the Czechs were to evacuate the Sudetanland which was to be occupied by Germany by stages, supervised by an international commission of four Powers. Czechoslovakian frontiers were guaranteed against unprovoked foreign aggression by England and France, and a loan was granted to her by England. Germany and Italy also undertook to join when the legitimate claims of Hungary and Poland had been satisfied.

The Munich Agreement was a humiliation to the Western Allies and a recognition of the new status of Germany. It was a definite pointer to the military and moral unpreparedness of Britain and France, and a definite failure of the system of collective security as represented by the League of Nations. Moreover, it was reiteration of the desire for peace which was the uppermost consideration with the peoples of the Western democracies. In France there was utter confusion; in Czechoslovakia remorse at being betrayed by allies. The feeling of sacrifice for the salvation of Europe was uppermost there. Writers have denounced Munich appeasement and have characterized it "as the final subversion of Versailles", "a total and unmitigated defeat", "a surrender to Nazi bluff," the "sale of Czechoslovakia" etc., etc.

The Munich Agreement, nevertheless, was not the end of the matter. Soon the Poles seized Teschen area, and to Germany was ceded a corridor to connect with Vienna. Sudetanland was coordinated with Germany, and this gave stimulus to disruptive tendencies. Slovakia became an autonomous government; and in Moravia and Bohemia the German minority demanded special privileges. Benes resigned the Presidency and Hacha succeeded him. Chwalkovsky became the Foreign Minister, and these two changed the foreign policy to obtain good relations with Germany. But the Czechs were not docile and the anti-German section raised its head again. This failure to toe the German line brought forth its disintegration. The procedure which had succeeded so well in the case of Austria was adopted and Hacha and Chwalkovsky were invited to Berlin on 14 March 1939 and, within hours before the dawn next day, under charge of breaking the Munich Agreement and threat of destruction of Prague, had signed an agreement placing "the fate of the Czech people and of their country in the hands of the Fuhrer of the German Reich". By midday, the German forces had occupied Prague; the Skoda works had fallen into German hands, and Hitler entered the country proclaiming Bohemia and Moravia as a Protectorate of Germany. Hungary also fed herself on Carpathian-Ukraine which she annexed. Thus ended Czechoslovakia as an independent Republic, and German predominance in Central Europe on the Danube was fully assured.

The Prague incident was not to be the last, and the next adventure was planned against Poland, which had been created at Versailles and was given German territory separating East Prussia and Danzig from the rest of the Reich. Poland was also conceived of as a watch-dog in the east to keep Germany within bounds. Poland was an important element in the entire French alliance system. But Poland was drifting into a pro-German foreign policy by 1934, and concluded a non-aggression pact with the latter. This

cordiality did not, however, last long and under domestic pressure and on the question of Danzig, relations became tense. But Colonel Beck had done little to build up a solid block of alliances in his support. All that was done was to open technical talks with the French Chief of General Staff. But French policy itself was hesitant and the nation was in the grips of a moral crisis. In 1938 when Poland needed French help most, Polish Ambassador, Lukaszewicz characterised France as "a defeated army, unable to disengage itself from the pursuing enemy. She is too feeble to break with her international engagements, and too feeble firmly to stand by them. Chaotic and resigned, she yields beforehand a defeatist assent to anything that may happen in Eastern or Central Europe".<sup>8</sup> The British Prime Minister had signed the Munich Agreement and was in no position to afford effective protection to Poland. The disintegration of Czechoslovakia, and the German protectorate over Slovakia posed new threats to Poland for now her defences westward were definitely turned. Then followed the German occupation of Memel when, on 23 March 1939, Hitler visited that port along with his Baltic Fleet. Professor Namier has mentioned that Hitler grew violently sea-sick on that trip "and this hardened his determination to obtain from the Poles an overland connection with East Prussia".<sup>9</sup> Poland was further "outflanked and outwitted" by this new occupation.

Danzig had been definitely leaning towards Nazism, as was apparent from Nazi victories in the successive elections. Its incorporation in the Reich was being pressed for, and in January 1939 Ribbentrop had asked for concession of an extra-territorial railway and road through the Polish Corridor. In March these demands were repeated peremptorily, but the Polish reply did not yield the desired concessions. The conversations between Ribbentrop, Lipske, Moltke and Beck in the last few days of March did not help resolve the tangle, rather they thickened the crisis. On the Danzig and railway question Poland was in no mood to surrender. Reich Government had added charges of persecution of German nationals in Poland to the demand for territory and "elucidation of Poland's attitude towards the Axis". The Germans started their usual war of nerves; and the Poles meant to show that they could not be intimidated, but would call the "German bluff".<sup>10</sup> This stiffening of Polish attitude would be meaningless without confidence of support from firm allies. After the Czechoslovakian tragedy British opinion had definitely veered away from the policy

8. Quoted by Namier in *Diplomatic Prelude*, p. 73.

This view appears unduly critical and much too drastic, but reveals the Polish attitude at the time.

9. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude*, p. 83.

10. Ibid, p. 192.

of appeasement which had been followed by Neville Chamberlain. There was a perceptible stepping up of armament production and aeroplanes were flowing in appreciable numbers from the assembly line. There was also prospect of the United States sympathy, as opinion in that country was shocked by the Nazi tactics in Europe. Hence Chamberlain government sought to build up a collective defence, and the first step was the suggestion for a Four Power Declaration by Great Britain, France, Soviet Union and Poland. Polish and Roumanian jealousy of their eastern neighbour, the Soviet Union, made such a move abortive. However, Chamberlain, without seeking Soviet adherence, guaranteed Polish independence. He declared on 31 March, "in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect." This bold statement marked a definite departure in British foreign policy which was now committed to the defence of the Central European state system as defined by the Peace of Versailles. The Poles were made the judges of the time or occasion when British support might be evoked. If this British step had been reinforced by collective action based on prior agreement with the other Powers interested in limiting German aggression, it would have had better chance of success. But France was weak and hesitant, Italy had made an axis with Nazi Germany, Spain was reft by civil war, Turkey, Roumania and Yugoslavia were uncertain of their alignment and Soviet Union felt chagrined at being ignored by the Western Powers. However, Poland's resistance was stiffened by the prospect of British and French support.

Meanwhile, Hitler was ready with his "Case White", a plan for operation against Poland, and had set in motion diplomatic activity for the isolation of his eastern victim. Mussolini drew closer to the Fuhrer and utilised the occasion for launching an attack on Albania and overpowering it. The Franco-Italian Agreement of 1935 was also denounced; and in May, the Italian-German Axis was converted into a military alliance. Hitler also sought to wean the Soviet Union away from any possible Western coalition against him and exploited the resentment in Moscow against England to ensure Soviet neutrality in any German-Polish clash of arms. On the other side, Great Britain and France also were angling for allies. Italian incursion into Albania prompted extension of guarantees to Greece and Roumania in April and signing of Mutual Assistance Pact with Turkey in May 1939. The President of the United States also expressed his concern at the deteriorating

international situation in Europe and addressed a message on 16 April to the two Axis partners asking for assurances that for a period of ten years their armed forces would not attack or invade the thirty states which were mentioned by him. This provoked a campaign of vituperation against the United States both in Italy and Germany. Hitler in his famous speech of April 28 in the Reichstag ridiculed the American President and protested the "pacific purposes of the Third Reich". He used this occasion to denounce the Anglo-German Naval Treaty and the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact on the ground that the British guarantee to Poland had superseded the basis of these engagements. Hitler charged the British Government with plotting to oppose Germany "in all circumstances" and of adopting "the policy of encirclement", and therefore as "an action of self-respect" renounced the Naval Agreement. Hitler's argument for the denunciation of Polish non-Aggression Pact was that the Anglo-Polish guarantee "would in certain circumstances compel Poland to take military action against Germany in the event of a conflict between Germany and any other Power, in which England in her turn would be involved. This obligation is contrary to the agreement which I made with Marshal Pilsudski some time ago. I therefore look upon the agreement as having been unilaterally infringed by Poland and thereby no longer in existence". Hitler's thesis now, as Professor Namier puts it, was "that Poland, by her understanding with Great Britain, had infringed her agreement with Germany and committed herself to an anti-German Policy".<sup>11</sup> Refusal of Poland to accommodate Germany in the matter of Danzig and passage to East Prussia and her entry into alliance with France and Great Britain were regarded as definite expressions of her aggressive intentions against the Reich. Change in British foreign policy involving approach to Soviet Union, broadcasting guarantees to east European states and closer military understanding with France were interpreted as symptoms of Franco-British-Polish hostility to Germany and their resolve to tie the Reich to the Versailles strings. And these stiffened Hitler's resolve to liquidate Poland before the ring was tightened against him.

The subsequent steps which Hitler contemplated are clearly indicated in his directive of 23 May to his Commander-in-Chief. After reiterating progress at home since his assumption of power and the hostility of England to the German national aspirations, he emphasised that the Poles "will always side with our opponents. In spite of Treaty, Poland always harboured the intention to exploit every opportunity against us. Danzig is not our object. Our aim is to round off our Lebensraum in the East and secure Our food supply. . . . . If fate force us into war with the

11. Namier, p. 212.

West, more space in the East will be useful. . . . . The Polish problem is inseparable from conflict in the West. Poland's inner power of resistance to Bolshevism is doubtful. Therefore Poland a doubtful barrier against Russia. In war against the West quick decisive success doubtful; similarly doubtful is Poland's attitude. The Polish regime cannot withstand pressure from Russia. Poland sees in German victory over the West a danger for herself, and will try to deprive us of it. There can therefore be no question of sparing Poland, and the decision is at the first suitable opportunity to attack Poland". In this communication, Hitler had expressed his desire for a temporary rapprochement with Russia. And during the summer months Stalin was approached by both the parties, but ultimately Hitler was able to outbid his rivals and the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (Moscow Pact) was signed on 23 August. Stalin was suspicious of the Western democracies and feared that they might ultimately relinquish Russia to be ravaged by the Nazis. The Western Powers had little faith in Soviet integrity and were not prepared to leave the Baltic States to the mercy of the Communists. Ideological differences could not be subordinated to the exigencies of strategy. Hitler merely wanted Russian neutrality and was willing to pay the price for it in the form of Soviet military control over the Baltic states and territorial adjustments in Poland.

With the signing of the Moscow Pact by Hitler and the British confirmation of the Polish guarantee by a formal Anglo-Polish Alliance directed against Germany,<sup>12</sup> the stage was set for the war. But the last six days of August 1939 were full of hectic negotiations to ward off the impending danger of a European war. German determination to acquire Danzig and the Corridor peacefully or by resort to military action, if inevitable, was matched by the equal determination by the other side not to yield to the Nazi threat. Poland had mobilised and the opposing forces were facing each other. Allegations were made by the Reich Government of brutalities against German minorities in the Polish Corridor and of infringement of the border. The situation was fraught with grave danger of war. Last attempts were made for direct Polish-German negotiations, on the one side, and the formulation of minimum terms, on the other; appeals were made for delay and conciliatory action. But a study of the exchanges of notes and verbal communications between the British and French ambassadors, on the one hand, and the Reich Government, on the other, leaves the impression that the Western Powers were intent on procrastination which the German Government was keen to prevent. Hitler could not postpone solution of Danzig and Corridor affairs without loss of

12. Namier, p. 319, for a summary of its terms.

face. Beck was not prepared to meet Hitler and discuss directly with him the terms of a resolution of the crisis. In this situation war could not be prevented. On 31 August, Hitler published his terms and showed that Polish intransigence was responsible for the repudiation of his modest and reasonable demands. On 1 September war was declared against Poland and the German armies marched into that state. This was followed by France and England declaring war on Germany under their compacts with the Poles. The Second World War had commenced.



## CHAPTER II

# India on the Eve of War

### A

#### THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND IN INDIA

The United Kingdom entered war against Nazi Germany to protect Poland from Hitler's aggression and fulfil the conditions of alliance entered into with that eastern state. This was the climax of a situation which was developing since 1935 and clearly revealed a departure from the policy of peace which had been followed after the Versailles settlement. In this championship of the cause of Poland, Great Britain had the support of France, but failed to obtain collaboration of the Soviet Union, Italy or Turkey. The United States, though opposed to totalitarianism, was not yet ready to join the Western democracies in the struggle against Nazism. Soviet Union had a non-aggression pact with Germany and Fascist Italy was in expressed sympathy with Hitler's policies. Japan in the east was a member of the Axis with Italy and Germany. But neither Italy nor Japan had joined the war immediately. Thus Germany had entered the lists without any partners at the moment; but in their existing unpreparedness Britain and France were unable to render any effective assistance to their Polish ally pressed hard by the full might of a resurgent martial Germany.

The action of the British Government found immediate support in Australia and New Zealand whose governments declared war on Germany, seeking confirmation from their own Parliaments immediately afterwards. South Africa did the same only after a change of government, and Canada took nearly a week to stand by the side of the United Kingdom after seeking approval of the legislature. The Eire remained neutral. But India was proclaimed a belligerent simultaneously with the British declaration of war. This action was taken by the Governor-General, under instructions from the Secretary of State in London, without waiting to seek the verdict of the Legislative Assembly or to consult the Indian political leaders. The entry of India into war thus was decided for her by the British rulers and was in spite of the explicit opposition of the Indian National Congress to India's participation in Imperialist wars and its insistence upon freedom of "India to direct her own foreign policy as an independent nation". The Congress Working Committee had earlier

opposed legislation to confer on the Central Legislature sole legislative power in the event of emergency arising out of war. It had objected to the despatch of Indian troops for service outside India and, as a protest against Government action, called upon the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the next session. The Provincial Governments manned by Congress Ministries were also warned "to assist in no way the war preparations of the British Government". In the face of the open declaration by the All India Congress Committee that "the Congress is determined to oppose all attempts to impose a war on India and use Indian resources in a war without the consent of the Indian people", declaration of the existence of "a state of war emergency" in India by the Viceroy and Indian participation in the European war, without seeking the verdict of the people, provoked a political crisis which thickened as the war progressed. This dual and mutually antagonistic approach to war by the Government and the major political organisation in the country was a striking feature of the war period and influenced India's attitude and participation in the global war. For a correct appreciation of the implications of this situation, it may be appropriate here to review the political developments in India before the war came in 1939.

The British rule in India as established in a century after Plassey was an unqualified alien despotism conducted by the Directors of a mercantile association and the Board of Control appointed by the Government of Great Britain. The transfer of power to the Crown of England in 1858 did not materially alter the basis of government. The Secretary of State for India, accountable to British Parliament, had supreme control over Indian administration, which he conducted through a bureaucracy solely recruited in Great Britain and composed mainly of British citizens. The government in India was carried on primarily in the interest of British people and did not owe any responsibility to the people of India. Even when representative institutions were established, after 1860, the Indian element was both meagre and unrepresentative to be in a position to influence Government policies. Their main function was to assist in legislation, which till 1919 was enacted by the official majority acting under the behest of the Secretary of State. Neither taxation nor state expenditure was determined by the vote of the legislature or the will of the people. Executive government was not at all subject to the popular will and was often conducted in opposition to it. The unmitigated bureaucratic despotism of a foreign people evoked sentiments of national resentment and patriotic ferment leading to a movement for political reform and freedom ultimately.

British dominion in India did not expand without meeting resistance, first from the Indian States and later from the landed aristocracy of the country. Early disaffection burst forth in local revolts, misrepresentation of the purpose of governmental measures, or withdrawal of cooperation from administrative policies. The climax of this attitude was reached in the Revolt of 1857 which was a major exhibition of the spirit of freedom and the resentment of people against the entire fabric of British rule which had rudely demolished the structure of Indian society and undermined the basis of indigenous thinking and politico-economic relationships. The suppression of the Revolt by stern military action conducted by superior force brought forth a new bitterness, on the one hand, and awareness of the futility of methods of violence as the means of securing independence, on the other. In the second half of the nineteenth century two prominent strains of leadership are visible in the country. One continued the old tradition and sought to organise the masses by rousing their national consciousness and stimulating love for ancient culture and Indian way of life. Pride in the glorious past and worship of the heroes of previous generations helped to restore national self-respect. The extremist national movement and revolutionary activities were the result of the impulse provided by this section. The other was impressed by the Western democratic liberal thought and the superiority of the British people in the matter of military strength, economic progress and political organisation. This leadership had been soaked in English culture and had implicit faith in the sense of British justice and rationality. It genuinely believed that the future of Indian people lay in a close and continuing association with the British people, which alone would contribute to the emergence of India from feudal medievalism into a modern state. The advocates of this view adopted the method of representation, petitions and resolutions, which was given the name of constitutional method, to draw the attention of the Government to administrative abuses and obtain reforms. This group was responsible for the foundation of a number of local political associations and, later in 1885, an all-India organisation known as the Indian National Congress.

In the period before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and the era of non-cooperation, the Congress stood for representative institutions of the colonial type, larger association of Indians in the higher rungs of administration, greater recruitment of Indians into higher public service, both civil and military decrease in taxation, reduction in military expenditure, abandonment of aggressive foreign and frontier policy and non-employment of Indian forces outside the country for imperial purposes. The Government response to these appeals and prayers was meagre

and slow. Up to 1909, Legislative Councils were established at the Centre and in the major provinces, but the Indian element in these did not command a majority except in a few provinces, and was not representative of the people as such but of classes and interests. The administration was centralised in the Governor-General in Council, and up to the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1919, the Indian Legislative Council was official dominated and presided over by the Governor-General himself. The powers of the legislature were limited, for they had no control either over the budget or the executive government. Indians were denied the right to manage their own affairs and their share in the public services was both meagre and subordinate. In the economic and cultural fields also the position was not different. Indian economy was subservient to British interests inasmuch as the country exported raw materials and foodgrains and imported manufactured goods for internal consumption. The old industry had languished and the new modern industry was still in its infancy, subjected to the indifference of Government and hostility of British manufacturing interests. The peasantry was burdened with heavy land tax and was eking out a precarious living from the soil which remained the only source of subsistence. In the period before 1918 the country suffered from frequent visitations of famine which were an index of the poverty and destitution of the common man. Educationally India was backward, percentage of illiteracy being nearly 90; culturally India was swept by the inroad of westernism which had weakened the foundations of the society and dried up the indigenous sources of artistic and intellectual progress. This condition was attributed to the blighting effects of foreign rule and generated a state of disaffection and revolt which led to the growth of extremism in Indian politics, the formation of nationalist parties and revolutionary groups. The moderate Congress began to lose weight, and its inability to obtain rapid constitutional advance helped to promote lack of faith in the constitutional method. The Great War brought fresh vigour to the extremist movements and when the Armistice was signed, Indian politics was at the cross-roads, moderation or extremism depending on the policy of the British Government and the measure of political advance to be conceded by the Parliament of Great Britain.

On 20 August 1917, an announcement was made by Mr. Montague in the House of Commons to the effect that "the policy of His Majesty's Government . . . . is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of British Empire". This generous pronouncement, however, was hedged in by two limitations, one

that "progress in this policy can be achieved by successive stages" and two that "the British Government and the Government of India... must be the judges of the time and measure of each advance." There was thus a prospect of a long apprenticeship, the end of which was not in sight and depended on the sweet will and interest of the imperial master. There was no mention of even a Dominion Status which had come to be associated in certain circles with the demand for self-government voiced in 1905. Nationalist India had been demanding responsible government in the whole sphere of administration, but the Act of 1919 provided for a very limited and paltry institution of this principle in the field of provincial government. The over-all superintendence over the entire range of government, both central and provincial, still continued to vest in the Governor-General, who was to act under the guidance of the Secretary of State. This first instalment of constitutional reform, therefore, could not satisfy the Indian mind and though the dyarchy in the provinces was worked, it was not without severe strain and by ignoring that principle. The immediate reaction of the new measures was the launching of the Non-Cooperation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi, which was as much a protest against the character of government in India as against the British foreign policy towards the Turkish Sultan and their attitude towards the Muslim sentiments as regards the Khilafat. This first non-violent action, withdrawing cooperation from the machinery of government met with great enthusiasm and brought the mass of people into it and converted the political struggle into a popular movement. But it was withdrawn owing to the lapse into violence of people at Chauri Chaura. The consequence of this measure was demoralisation and division in the political ranks and the outburst of communal frenzy leading to occasional disputes and riots between the Muslims and Hindus. The formation of the Swarajist Party, Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim Conference etc. with the object of wrecking or working the constitution, was a feature of the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. One thing was, however, evident that harmony and peace in the country and suppression of violent revolutionary activities, would demand early change in the governmental system and further constitutional progress.

The realisation of the necessity and imminence of change led to an examination of the political system suitable for India, and the next ten years were occupied with it leading ultimately to the Act of 1935. The discussion of this problem brought forth prominently divergence between British thinking and the Indian nationalist thinking, as well as accentuated communal bitterness, and further widened the gap between conflicting ideologies entertained by the various political parties in India. The Muddiman

Committee investigated into the working of dyarchy, and its minority report glaringly disclosed defects in it. In 1927 His Majesty's Government appointed the Indian Statutory Commission under Sir John Simon to review the constitutional problem in India and recommend steps, if appropriate, for the next stage of advance. Meanwhile, in "answer to the challenge that Indian nationalism was unconstructive", the All Parties Conference in February 1928 appointed the Nehru Committee "to consider and determine the principles of the Constitution of India". The Simon Commission met with a hostile reception owing to its all-white composition, and though it continued its work and produced a report, it was doomed to failure from the beginning, and its report was outmoded even before it was published. The Nehru Committee accepted, as a compromise, the principle of "full responsible government on the model of the constitution of the self-governing Dominions" to be attained not "as a remote stage of our evolution but as the next immediate step". Its attention was mainly occupied with finding a viable solution of the communal problem. But its moderate proposals failed to satisfy the extreme Muslim opinion, caused apprehension in the minds of the Indian Princes and antagonised the younger section in the Congress which now pressed for the declaration of independence as the immediate goal of the Congress. The All-India Moslem Conference pressed for the federal system of government "with complete autonomy and residual powers vested in the constituent states", and adhered to the system of separate electorate with weightage for the Muslims in the provinces where they were in a minority, and sought due share for them in the central and provincial cabinets. The Muslim League's insistence on a federal constitution as opposed to the vehemence of the Hindus in advocating unitary government was an important feature of Indian politics at the time. The rulers of Indian States recognising the strength of the political stirrings in their subjects and the sympathy of the Congress for the cause of the States Peoples' Conference, and also appreciating the inevitability of democratic change in India and ultimate transfer of power from the British to Indian hands, sought assurances for the protection of their interests. The failure of the Nehru Report and the British callousness in suppressing the opposition to the Simon Commission, afforded strong stimulus to the demand for independence and immediate secession from the British Empire. The ideal of Dominion Status could no longer enthuse the nationalists.

In 1929, to assuage feelings and secure cooperation for the contemplated constitutional reforms, Lord Irwin made a statement that "It is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status". He further stated

that after the Simon Commission had reported, the British Government would meet representatives of British India and of the States "for the purpose of seeking the greatest possible measure of agreement for the final proposals which it would later be the duty of His Majesty's Government to submit to Parliament". The suggestion for a Round Table Conference was made to placate Indian opinion; but it was futile to hope for the cooperation of the Congress unless a definite and immediate advance to Dominion Status was contemplated by the British Government. The nationalist leaders, therefore, wanted clarification of the purpose of the Conference and sought for predominant representation for the Congress. In a statement they emphasised, "We understand that the Conference is to meet not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion constitution for India". The Viceroy failed to give this assurance and the Congress, at its Lahore session, a few days later, resolved that "the word Swaraj shall mean complete Independence and that nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference". This was followed by the declaration of a campaign of Civil Disobedience involving defiance of unjust and oppressive laws, refusal to pay taxes and boycott of foreign goods, etc. The movement began with the breach of Salt Laws, and within a short time the country witnessed unprecedented scenes of popular enthusiasm and non-violent revolt of the mass of population. Meanwhile the Round Table Conference had met, but its proceedings, in the first session, were devoid of reality in the absence of the participation of the Congress which alone was in a position to 'deliver the goods'. For the success of the Conference experiment, it was essential that the Civil Disobedience Movement be withdrawn and the Congress representatives participate in the deliberations at St. James Palace in London. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact brought about a truce and Mahatma Gandhi joined the Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress. But the proceedings did not proceed smoothly and the ship of Conference was wrecked on the rock of the communal and sectional intransigence, each seeking a major share in the division of power. The Indian Princes, in spite of their early offer of joining a federation, were hesitant to shoulder the obligations accruing from it, and had no intention to democratise their governmental machinery. The greatest stumbling-block, however, was the mounting communal disharmony and mutual fear. The second session was as purposeless as the first; and in India, in the absence of Mahatma Gandhi, recriminations and allegations of breach of the Pact, on either side, between the Government and the Congress, led to the revival of Civil Disobedience and its relentless repression by the Government. Meanwhile the third session of the Conference was held, a White

Paper embodying the British proposals for constitutional reforms was issued, and a Bill based on these was presented to the British Parliament.

The Government of India Act of 1935 was based on the principles of autonomy for the provinces within a federal form of government. The province was accorded a legal personality, and responsible government, subject to certain safeguards, was introduced therein. The Governor was to be aided and advised by a Council of Ministers, except when he acted 'in his discretion' or 'exercised his individual judgment'. These 'special responsibilities' were defined and the Instrument of Instructions laid down the manner in which he was to act to ensure working of responsible government in the province. At the centre was to be established the Federation of India, comprising the provinces and the Indian States, to come into operation only when a certain proportion of the States had signified their assent to accede to it. At the federal level the element of responsibility was limited by the separation of defence, external and ecclesiastical affairs from the purview of the Council of Ministers. These were special responsibilities of the Governor-General, who might appoint Counsellors for the discharge of these functions. Thus, dyarchy terminated in the provincial sphere was reproduced at the centre. The system of separate electorates for the Muslims and the representation of the minorities in the legislatures on the basis of Communal Award was continued. In Federal Legislature, for the lower house, the method of indirect election was adopted. This constitution was an advance on that of 1919, but still it fell far short of Dominion Status, and Independence, the goal of the Congress, was a far cry. According to Coupland "the essence of Dominion Status is its assertion of equality between a Dominion and Britain and the other Dominions. India would not attain to this equality under the Act of 1935. For an unstated period India would still be subordinate to Britain in three main respects." These three were (i) dyarchy at the Centre; (ii) leaving ultimate control over foreign policy and defence to the Secretary of State and the British Parliament; (iii) safeguards and the inferior status of the Federal Legislature to that of the British Parliament in so far as the Governor-General under the control of the Secretary of State had power to refuse assent to legislation and the final power of disallowance rested with the Crown. The British Parliament also could legislate for India not merely when the latter asked for it as was the case with the Dominions. However, the British Government had "declared that the provisions of the Act which precluded full self-government were to be regarded as transitional," though no limit was assigned to this



phase.<sup>1</sup> The new Act was applied in so far as the provinces were concerned, but the Federal part of it was never brought into operation as its enforcement depended on the consent of the Indian Princes who hesitated to relinquish their existing status.

The reaction to the new constitution was varied. The British opinion, and perhaps that of some moderates in India, was, with Coupland, that the new Act "had made possible the transference of India's destiny from British to Indian control", and if the Princes were to make the establishment of Federation possible, and Hindus and Muslims could subordinate their sectional interests to work the system in the interest of the "greater welfare of the whole, the attainment of Dominion Status was in sight". This optimism was not shared by the Congress or the Muslim League: the Congress condemned the whole Act and wanted to destroy it, the Muslim League denounced the safeguards as incompatible with responsible government but wanted to utilise the provincial part of the constitution for "what it is worth". The Congress felt that the Act did not conduce to independence, and the Muslim League condemned it as not conceding "full self-government at the centre", and in this attitude both were on the same plane. Sir Syed Wazir Hasan, in his presidential address at the Bombay session of the Muslim League in April 1936, called the Act "a monstrosity" which "will strengthen all the most reactionary elements in the country and will enchain and crush the forces making for democracy and freedom." The Congress now took up vehemently its demand for a Constituent Assembly to frame the constitution of a free India. Previous to this when the plan of 1935 was discussed in the new Legislative Assembly, though the Congress motion of its outright rejection was defeated, Mr. Jinnah's three resolutions on the scheme were carried by the combined votes of the Congress and the Muslims. These resolutions respectively accepted the communal award, criticised the provincial autonomy plan for its shortcomings and "denounced the plan of the all India Federation as fundamentally bad and totally unacceptable, and demanded a prompt effort to bring about the establishment of full responsible government in British India alone".<sup>2</sup> There was a certain uniformity and nearness in the politics of the Congress and the Muslim League which was in evidence even during the period of elections to the provincial legislatures under the new Act, and an element of co-operation existed between the two.

The elections brought victory to the Congress which won 711 seats out of a total of 1,585, and had absolute majorities in five

1. Coupland, *The Indian Problem*, Part I.

2. Coupland, Part II, p. 9.

provinces, and was the largest party in three more. In Bengal, Punjab and Sind, its position was not strong and it had failed to get more than 26 of the Muslim seats, the rest of them being captured by persons subscribing to parties other than the Congress or the Muslim League. The Congress had entered the election contest "not to cooperate in any way with the Act, but to combat it and seek the end of it", and had postponed decision on the issue of office acceptance. There was no unanimity on that subject. When the elections brought victory to the Congress the verdict of the people was construed as the condemnation and utter rejection of the Act. The people, it was stated in the Resolution of the All-India Congress Committee of 18 March, 1937, "desire to frame their own constitution, based on national independence, through the medium of a Constituent Assembly elected by adult franchise". The Congress Committee demanded the withdrawal of the constitution. Meanwhile, the Congress-elected members of the legislature were so to act as to "lead to deadlocks with the British Government and bring out still further the inherent antagonism between British Imperialism and Indian Nationalism and expose the autocratic and undemocratic nature of the new Constitution". On the major issue of office acceptance, the decision of the All India Congress Committee was to permit the formation of ministries in the Congress majority provinces only if "the leader of Congress party in the legislature is satisfied and is able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of Ministers in regard to their constitutional activities". In other words, office was to be accepted only on the condition of non-exercise of the special powers of safeguard, discretion and individual judgement as contained in the Act. On the refusal of the Governors to give such an assurance, the Congress declined to form governments, though in the Punjab, Bengal and Sind ministries began functioning. Interim governments failing to be effective, ultimately on 22 June, the Governor-General clarified the position as regards safeguards and extended the assurance that Governors would not "intervene at random in the administration of the Province." Thereafter Congress ministries were formed and Provincial Autonomy began functioning. But no progress was made in the implementation of the Federal part of the Act, because the Indian States sulked from it, and the other sections were not enthusiastic about it. The British Government also appears to have been dilatory in its policy towards the Federation and perhaps did not want to share power at the Centre with the Congress, particularly in a situation of mounting crisis in the international sphere.

The new constitutional experiment in Provincial Autonomy worked without any serious deadlocks or breakdowns, and gene-

rally the output of Provincial Governments, both in the matter of legislation pertaining to social welfare or economic reforms and maintenance of law and order and stability of the state, was appreciable. The operation of 'safeguards' also did not create conflicts. But the monolithic character of ministries in the Congress Provinces, particularly the United Provinces, produced a strong reaction in the Muslim League leadership who had desired coalition governments in order to have a share in the administration of the provinces. Similarity of election programmes and electoral understandings, together with the close association between the leaders of the two parties, had strengthened the hope of the League leaders being included in provincial cabinets. But after the electoral victories, Congress leadership was inclined to accept the League leaders only on the condition of their absolute absorption in the Congress body and obliteration of their separate identity as Muslim leaders. The refusal of the Congress Parliamentary Board to accommodate the Muslim League occasioned a serious and definite breach between the two and accentuated the communal problem which was a feature of this period. In consequence, Congress policies and measures of educational, economic or social reform were denounced on the ground of their being prejudicial to Muslim interests and the Congress administration was characterised as repressive and an illustration of the tyranny of the Hindu majority. The Muslim League session, in October 1937, "denounced the Congress for pursuing an exclusively Hindu policy which was bound to intensify communal antagonism. Moslems can expect neither justice nor fairplay under Congress government."<sup>3</sup> This attitude adopted at the Commencement of the Congress ministries continued to influence Muslim thinking and aggravate communal tension. The Congress attempt to assure the minority that it is "its primary duty and fundamental policy to protect the religious, linguistic, cultural and other rights. . . . so as to ensure for them. . . . the widest scope for their development and their participation in the fullest measure in the political, economic and cultural life of the nation" and its programme of "mass contact" widened the breach further. The League was strengthened by it and became an important force in Indian politics. The publication of Pirpur and Shareef Reports and the pamphlet entitled "Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule", envenomed the atmosphere further. By October 1938 demand for the revision of the constitution was made so that the Muslims may "secure an honourable and legitimate status" due to them and under which they "may attain full independence". Self-determination and independence for the Muslims became the new cry. Federation was no longer acceptable and, in September 1939, the League Working Committee

declared that it was "irrevocably opposed to any federal objective which must necessarily result in a majority community rule under the guise of democracy and a Parliamentary system of Government." At the time of the declaration of war in Europe, thus, the political situation in India had become grave with the intensification of communal rift and the Muslim demand for independence, on the one side, and the opposition of Indian Princes to the Federation, owing to their fear that democratic principles might encroach on their despotism, on the other. The federal part of the Act of 1935 had no prospect of realisation and its implementation was indefinitely postponed.

The Congress had commenced the new constitutional regime with an unequivocal opposition to the new Act, but while denouncing the Federal part of it, decided to work the Provincial Autonomy with the object of wrecking it. But very soon it was evident that the legislative wing of the Congress was keen to utilise the new machine for introducing social reform and economic betterment of the mass of population. Therefore, the Congress was not prepared to accept any changes in the constitutional framework "which strikes at the very basis of Provincial Autonomy and renders it a farce in case of war". At the same time the Congress was formulating its own foreign policy, independent and in harmony with its creed. Since 1936, Congress leaders were conscious of the deteriorating international situation which, they feared, might result in a global war but with which the Congress should have nothing to do. Their opposition to Fascism and Imperialism was well pronounced. Hence they wanted India to keep aloof from both and "pursue her path of peace and freedom". The election manifesto of 1936 declared emphatically "opposition to the participation of India in an Imperialist war". They condemned the attempt to amend the Act, in April 1939, empowering the irresponsible Central Government to concentrate all legislative authority in case of a declaration of emergency arising out of war. The Congress was definitely hostile to the despatch of Indian troops for service outside the country, and in that connection declared that it was "determined to oppose all attempts to impose a war on India and use Indian resources in a war without the consent of Indian People". In August 1939, when the war clouds were gathering, the Congress Working Committee enunciated its policy that "India cannot associate herself with democratic freedom which is denied to her and which is likely to be betrayed" in the event of an imperial war. When more Indian troops were sent abroad, to Egypt and Singapore, the Congress members were asked to refrain from attending the session of the Legislative Assembly at the Centre, and the Provincial Governments were advised to desist from assisting in any way "the war preparations of the British Govern-

ment." The definite, unambiguous hostility of the Congress to India's participation in war in her existing political status of dependence was fully well known on the eve of war. The attitude of the other political parties was not so explicit, but the Muslim League was not interested in war participation unless its new political demands had any prospect of realisation. The political climate of India was not propitious for a willing and whole-hearted cooperation in war effort. The internal complications arising out of the antagonism between the Congress and the Muslim League, the increasing communal hatred between the Muslims and Hindus, the suspicions of the Indian Princes against the Federation and their reluctance to align themselves with the political movement to gain freedom for the country, and the national demand for immediate independence and transfer of power to enable the people's representatives to defend their country's freedom, all made the situation far more complex.

It was in this atmosphere that the British Government declared India as a belligerent in the European war, without consulting the Indian political leaders or previously referring the issue to the Central Legislature. Its immediate effect was the resignation of Congress Provincial Governments and suspension of Provincial Autonomy in these provinces. The Muslim League celebrated this event as a day of deliverance. The split was complete, and the situation was neither auspicious for political progress nor for the full utilisation of India's resources in the British fight against Germany and her Fascist allies.

## B

### THE INDIAN DEFENCE POSTURE

Thus, psychologically and politically India was not prepared for participation in a war which England might wage on account of her policies in Europe or in the interest of her empire. Militarily also India was in no better situation. The Indian army had been primarily intended for defence of the country against any invasion from the north-west. The whole strategic planning prior to the year 1936 was directed against such a contingency. Traditionally, the British still regarded Russia as the possible disturber of peace in the north-west. Even the danger of an offensive campaign on the part of Afghanistan was not ruled out, and the tribes of the north-west frontier were apprehended to rise in the wake of any offensive operations from the other side of the border. There was no danger from any other direction which was taken into account at this stage. As long as the British Fleet was strong in the Indian Ocean, there was no threat to the

security of the long coastline of India. The northern and the eastern frontiers were also not threatened by any powerful enemy in those directions. Thus the only area which might be threatened was the north-west frontier; and the entire defence planning was based on the removal of that threat. The defence of India plans formulated in the decade before the beginning of the Second World War were based on the idea that it might be necessary to undertake an offensive campaign against Afghanistan with a simultaneous advance in two directions, in the north against Jalalabad and in the south against Kandahar. But by 1936 it was "quite evident that India's available resources in land forces were inadequate to put this plan of campaign into effect."<sup>4</sup> By that year the international situation had made it clear that the United Kingdom would be involved in a war with Germany, Italy or Japan or with a combination of any two or all of these Powers. Then danger from the north-west also might arise in case of such an involvement. The Government of India and the British Government in England were conscious of the inadequacy of the Indian army to meet the enhanced threat. In the defence plans made in the period intervening before the war, therefore, only defensive operations on the north-west frontier were envisaged.

The army in India consisted of Indian forces and such British troops as were posted in India for training or for strengthening the Indian military potential. In 1938 the total strength of British troops was 15,900, that of the Gurkha units 18,700, and the Indian troops numbered 125,800. The Indian army had been gradually reduced to this figure after the First World War largely on account of financial considerations and the demand of the Indian political leaders for its reduction. As early as 1921 the Legislative Assembly of India had determined the role of the Indian army and had made it explicit that the Indian forces should not be employed for imperial purposes outside the frontiers of India. Apart from the weakness in numbers the Indian army had not been mechanized and was still in possession of obsolete weapons and lacked means of mobility. While research and experiment elsewhere, after the Great War, had led to the production of new and powerful land weapons and the development of armoured vehicles, the Indian army "had remained virtually unchanged since the end of the Great War" in respect of its armament, equipment and means of mobility. According to the Report of the Modernisation Committee of October 1938, "the bulk of its cavalry is still horsed and owing to financial and other limitations the sole progress towards modernisation so far envisaged or achieved is the conversion of four British horsed cavalry regiments into light tank units, of two Indian horsed cavalry regiments into armoured car units to replace the tank corps units, and the partial mechanization of

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4. Modernisation Committee Report, p. 1.

the field artillery which is, however, still armed with obsolete weapons. The Engineer and Signal equipment falls far short of modern standards. So far as the infantry is concerned, the progress made has been confined to the substitution of the Vickers-Berthier light machine-gun for the old Lewis gun; but the establishment of these weapons is much below that considered desirable in other armies. The transport of Engineer, Signal and Infantry units is still based on the pack mule, the camel and the army transport mule cart. Furthermore there is very little anti-aircraft or anti-tank equipment." Hence, according to the Committee, "the value of the army in India as a fighting machine for use in modern war has decreased to an alarming extent in comparison with the armies of first-class powers. Judged by modern standards, the army in India is relatively immobile and under-armed and unfit to take the field against land or air forces equipped with up-to-date weapons." It was the view of the Committee that if the modernisation or mechanisation of the Indian army was delayed any longer "the divergence in tactical and strategic thought and in methods of training between it and British Army which is already only too evident must widen rapidly." This was the sad state of the Indian army in 1938 when proposals for its modernisation were taken up by the Government of India and His Majesty's Government in England.

The British Government appointed an Expert Committee in September 1938 to go into the question of modernisation. The terms of reference of the Committee were : "In the light of the recent report by the Chiefs of Staffs and of the Reports of the Cabinet Committee on the defence of India, and having regard to the increased cost of modern armaments, to the desirability of reorganising, equipping and maintaining the forces in India in accordance with the modern requirements and to the limited resources available in India for defence expenditure, to examine and report in the light of experience gained in executing the British rearmament programme, how these resources can be used to the best advantage and to make recommendations". This Committee, presided over by Lord Chatfield, examined the strategic situation as it then affected India and laid down the scale of mechanisation of the Indian forces as well as the role which they had to perform in the new international situation. This Committee had the benefit of the views of the Government of India and largely based its conclusions on the Report of the Modernisation Committee, appointed by the Government of India under Major-General Auchinleck. One of the important subjects for consideration by the Chatfield Committee was the share which the army in India should or would have to take in any schemes of Imperial defence. The Committee accepted the necessity of adhering to the earlier

commitments made by the Government of India in this respect. In 1929, when plans for the defence of India were being discussed, the British War Office had enquired whether in the event of any invasion from the north-west, the Government of India would agree to despatch forces to Iraq and Iran, in case those countries were attacked by Russia, in addition to accepting its responsibility for initially resisting the shock of an invasion from the direction of Afghanistan. The Government of India's reply was equivocal and hedged round with many stipulations, so that the agreement was hardly worth much. The Chief of General Staff wrote that in an emergency "we should, of course, do our utmost to meet the immediate requirements of the situation."

At this time it was quite clear that the army in India was not strong enough to repel any attack by a major Power without effective aid from the United Kingdom. At the same time it was evident that the British Government would have to depend on the armed forces of India to defend their Imperial interests and outposts in the east. This mutual inter-dependence was the basic principle of the role which was contemplated for the Indian army by the British War Office and the Government in England. It was on this basis that in 1933 the Government of England accepted to give a subsidy to the Indian Government for the maintenance of the Indian army. In the Garra Award the new role of the Indian army was clearly enunciated in the following words: "The duties of the army in India include the preservation of internal security in India, the covering of the lines of internal communication, and the protection of India against external attack. Though the scale of the forces is not calculated to meet external attack by a great Power, their duties might well comprise the initial resistance to such an attack pending the arrival of Imperial reinforcements." On this basis, the Government in England agreed to make an annual grant of £1,500,000 so that the Indian army might act as an Imperial reserve. The international situation having changed for the worse in 1936, this role of the Indian army, viz. of acting as an auxiliary to the United Kingdom in the defence of the Imperial interests, was further enlarged and by 1938 the desirability of India playing a more important part in the defence of Imperial interests was further emphasised. Owing to the Tripartite Agreement between Germany, Italy and Japan, it was believed that the vulnerability of the British Empire had seriously increased. Even India was assumed to be more vulnerable to external attack, and the Indian coastline was considered to be exposed to invasion. The Imperial Defence Committee and its sub-committee, known as the Pownall Sub-Committee, examined the position anew. The Pownall Sub-Committee emphasised the principle of joint responsibility in the following words: "The changed strategical situation



throughout the world and the development of modern armaments, particularly air forces, have brought into prominence the need for India, in her own interests, to play a more important part in the defence of the vital areas on our Imperial communications in the Middle and Far East." To achieve this end the Sub-Committee recommended, "the unconditional allocation of one Indian Division to His Majesty's Government as a strategic reserve for use wherever and whenever required." The underlying notion of this Imperial Reserve Division was that it should be reckoned as surplus to India's requirements and should, therefore, be treated as distinct from the rest of the forces maintained in India. The Cabinet Committee, in the Report dated 29th July 1938, and the British Cabinet desired that "the degree of obligation on the Government of India to place these troops at the disposal of the Home Government should be made somewhat more definite and expressed more precisely than is at present the case with reinforcements from India, but should fall short of an unconditional obligation."

The Chatfield Committee proceeded on these premises as well as the undertakings which had been accepted prior to its appointment. This Committee, however, went a step further and on the basis of their analysis of the strategic situation in the world, came to the conclusion that "the arena of India's defence against external aggression should, therefore, now be regarded as covering not only primarily her North-Western land frontier, but also, to an increasing extent, her sea communications in eastern waters and the strategic points which are vital to their security." From their point of view Singapore in the east and the Middle East areas lying on the main line of communication between India and the United Kingdom comprising Egypt, Aden and the Persian Gulf, were areas vital to the external security of India. The localities heretofore treated as Imperial outposts now became bastions of India's own external defence. Therefore, the Committee adopted the principle that "the forces maintained should be adequate not only for the narrower purposes of purely local defence, but also to assist in ensuring her security against external threats; and further that India should acknowledge that her responsibility cannot, in her own interests, be safely limited to the local defence of her land frontiers and coasts." The principle of joint responsibility and India bearing her full share in the interest of external security was now very explicitly and emphatically laid down. This implied that, in the words of the Committee, "the obligation (of sending troops overseas) on the Government of India is no longer a contract to perform something outside the sphere of their normal duties; it becomes an integral part of those duties." This was an advance from the principle accepted earlier, viz. that India should

set apart one division for purposes of assistance to the British Government in securing the defence of Imperial interests. Henceforth the "Imperial Reserve" was to be treated as an integral part of the Indian army and to be known as "External Defence Troops". The new principle as outlined by Lord Chatfield in the beginning of 1939 was that the entire army in India, in case of need, might be utilized for purposes of Imperial defence because, in his view, the security of India was intimately related to the security of the British Empire. The Chatfield Committee recommended on this ground an increase by £500,000 of the Imperial subsidy and a share in the cost for modernisation of the Indian army.

The recommendations of Lord Chatfield's Committee accepted the immediate need of modernising the Indian army, but their proposals envisaged completion of this process in a number of years. On the basis of the existing dangers and in view of modernisation, the Committee suggested reduction of the army in India by four cavalry regiments and sixteen infantry battalions of which one cavalry regiment and two infantry battalions were to be British. They also suggested a new distribution of the Indian army according to the role which it had to perform. The new distribution was to be between frontier defence troops, internal security troops, coast defence troops and general reserve. There was to be no separate force earmarked for Imperial purposes. Chatfield's recommendations implied that forces for external and internal duties would form an integral part of the land forces of India as a whole. The army may include a specially designated Special Defence Force which was to be equipped on a higher scale than the units in India for local defence. In respect of air and navy also a similar distinction was to be made, and the air and naval components were also to cooperate with the British forces in maintaining the defence of the Empire. The Chatfield Committee also recommended reorganisation of the ordnance factories in India so that in time to come India might become self-sufficient in respect of some elements of its armament and military equipment. The whole purpose of these recommendations was to make India as a "base on the grand scale and a provider of troops and supplies."<sup>3</sup>

Soon after the Report of the Chatfield Committee the process of modernisation was begun, but it was not intended to be completed in less than a number of years, for a great bulk of armament had to come from the United Kingdom where it could not receive any priority owing to the pressing requirements of equipment of the British army. The External Defence Force had not been formed immediately, but about two-thirds of this force earmarked for the purpose, as proposed by the Chatfield Committee, had been sent

<sup>3</sup>. *Grand Strategy*. VOL. II, p. 16.

abroad before the commencement of the war in September 1939. Troops had been sent to Malaya, Hong Kong, the Persian Gulf area and Aden. In all these schemes for defence and the role of the Indian army, the British Government had proceeded on the basis that "the responsibility for the defence of India rests through the Governor-General and the Secretary of State for India, with the British Government and with no one else; and that this responsibility will in no respect be weakened whatever political pressure is brought to bear on the Government of India." This view, on the basis of which the Government of India was taking action, was quite in contrast to the view held by the Indian political leaders that the defence of India was primarily the responsibility of India. The Indian political leaders accepted the view that the Indian army, which should be completely Indian, should be efficient and adequate for the needs of her defence. They desired that India should be self-sufficient in the matter of war material and that India should be independent of external sources of supply which could fail at a critical moment. They were however opposed to Indian troops being used for Imperial purposes. Some of the political leaders were not averse to cooperation with the Commonwealth in schemes of joint security; but such cooperation could arise only when India was free and had full control over her defence policy. The war came but without Indian aspirations being fulfilled and before the Indian army had been geared to the new role which it was called upon to perform in fulfilment of the British policy of fighting her enemies in her Imperial interests.

### CHAPTER III

## Plans and Politics in India 1939-40

War is but a continuation of diplomacy and comes only when, on a balance, each contestant is sure of his victory. In the formulation of foreign policy, military potential remained an essential factor. It is this fact which has been stated by Stephen Possony, that "whenever those responsible for foreign policy adopt a course which they expect might lead to international tensions and to military conflict that would endanger their nation's security, they will do so only after thorough examination of the military situation. . . . In other words, a government decides to adopt a conciliatory or intransigent attitude not only according to its political will to keep peace or go to war, but also according to the military chances at a given moment."<sup>1</sup> In 1939, Germany and her rivals England and France decided to go to war on the Polish issue, because both sides hoped for eventual success. Hitler decided to smash Poland in May 1939, and assumed that in this act he would likely encounter combined opposition of England, France and possibly Russia. In the event of such an alliance his anticipation was "I would be constrained to attack England and France with a few smashing blows", and he never doubted his victory both in the east and the west. His optimism was based on the military unpreparedness of England and France at the time. Hitler was fully aware of the military capabilities of the Western Powers and his appreciation was that England would not be prepared for a war in less than two or three years. France was in no better position, while, on the contrary, the German military force was quite strong in his view to conquer Poland and liquidate opposition in the west as well. On this calculation he said, "We have nothing to lose; we can only gain. Our economic situation is such, because of our restrictions, that we cannot hold out more than a few years... We have no other choice, we must act. Our opponents risk much and can gain only a little." To a large extent Hitler was right in his calculations because, at the moment, the German forces were so strong and their strength so overwhelming that the Polish army was bound to collapse within a few days. Also England and France were not ready at the time to take an offensive against Germany with any definite prospect of success. But if the war were to be delayed. England and France in a year or two would become strong in all fields, particularly because of their economic

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<sup>1</sup>. *Origins and Causes of World War II*, p. 412.

strength, and with their allies would be able to defeat Germany quickly. It was this certainty of the relative weakness of Germany if the war were delayed and the strength of the Nazi forces at the moment to crush their enemies, both in the east and the west, which prompted Hitler to undertake an aggressive war against Poland despite the definite possibility of England and France joining their eastern ally to whom they had extended their guarantees only some time earlier. The only danger which Hitler could apprehend was from Russia joining the Western allies and forming a combination against Germany which would compel Hitler to fight on two fronts, always a dangerous prospect for Germany. He had, therefore, by his Non-Aggression Pact with Stalin, weaned away Soviet Russia from any immediate alliance with France and England. He was sure of friendship, alliance or at least benevolent neutrality of Italy on his behalf. He had also secured the neutrality for the time being of Bulgaria, Rumania and even Turkey. Armed with these alliances he could without fear attack Poland and then switch his forces on to an attack of the west, because without Russian support England and France were impotent to render any aid to Poland and save her from certain destruction.

England and France, on their side, while being conscious of their weakness at the moment, were not without hopes of victory because the military strength of these two nations was not inconsequential. In September 1938, in the matter of Czechoslovakia, Great Britain was not in a position to render effective support to France if she mobilized in case of German attack on Czechoslovakia. Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, had at that stage informed the French Government that "while His Majesty's Government would never allow the security of France to be threatened, they are unable to make precise statements of the character of their future action, or the time at which it would be taken, in circumstances that they cannot at present foresee." In the autumn of 1938 the British could not send to France more than two infantry divisions and 120 planes. The weakness of the French and the British armed forces at that time prevented them from intervening to save Czechoslovakia. Largely it was the weakness in the air, owing to the lack of modern planes, which had compelled them to submit to the Munich settlement. But in 1939, at the time of the Polish aggression, the situation was not so helpless. By that time the Anglo-French air forces had gained practically the same strength as that of the German-Italian air force. Production in England and France was increasing, and by the spring of 1940 there was expectation of its outdistancing the German air strength. "The two Western Powers produced 731 military aircraft per month at the outbreak of the war, while Germany's monthly average production of military aircraft was

395.”<sup>2</sup> In the months after the declaration of war, while German production arose to nearly 500 planes, the Anglo-French production grew much faster, and they had the expectation of getting a monthly delivery of 160 aircraft from the United States. This expected superiority in the air force which was bound to counterbalance effectively the Axis strength was one of the major elements in determining the attitude of England and France to stand in support of Poland and put a stop to the German aggressiveness in Central Europe. They had hoped for Soviet support and the neutrality of Italy, but in this their calculations were not quite correct. Owing to the attitude of Poland and the sentiments of Western Powers regarding the Baltic states, Stalin’s active sympathy and support could not be gained for the Western Powers immediately. However, Italian neutrality remained a fact for some months in the early stages of the war. During this period the British army was strengthened and the manufacture of munitions and arms was greatly accelerated. This prospect of increasing their strength, getting support from the United States and obtaining all-out help from the Dominions and other parts of the British Empire, were the main factors which encouraged the British Government in September 1939 to go to war against Germany. Though German strength was greater at the moment, in a long war Britain hoped to destroy the Nazi aggressive spirit.

In 1939 after the Czechoslovak affair, the United Kingdom and France had started discussions regarding effective co-operation between the two. A number of decisions were taken at the time and a machinery for close collaboration had been also devised. A general strategy was also outlined. At the moment the assumption was that the two would be ranged against a coalition of Germany and Italy, and intervention by Japan was also taken into account. Their broad strategic policy was stated thus :

“We should be faced by enemies who would be more fully prepared than ourselves for war on a national scale, would have superiority in air and land forces, but would be inferior at sea and in general economic strength. In these circumstances, we must be prepared to face a major offensive directed against either France or Great Britain or against both. To defeat such an offensive we should have to concentrate all our initial efforts, and during this time our major strategy would be defensive.

“Nevertheless. Italian action in North Africa may give the opportunity for counter-offensive operations early in the war, without prejudice to the success of the defence of Europe.

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2. *Origins and Consequences of World War II*, p. 436.

"Our control of Italian communications to East Africa and adequate measures to raise the tribes in Ethiopia might achieve early results in that area.

"In general, therefore, we should be ready to seize any opportunity of obtaining, without undue cost, successes against Italy which might reduce her will to fight.

"Our subsequent policy should be directed to holding Germany and to dealing decisively with Italy, while at the same time building up our military strength to a point at which we shall be in a position to undertake the offensive against Germany.

"During these stages the steady and rigorous application of economic pressure would be reducing the powers of resistance of our enemies.

"Meanwhile, in peace, as later in war, all the resources of diplomacy should be directed to securing the benevolent neutrality or active assistance of other Powers, particularly the United States of America."

To a large extent the broad lines of this policy were followed in the subsequent stages of the war. Their appreciation at the moment was that Poland could not be saved and that her fate would depend only upon the ultimate outcome of the war.

As regards the Far East, the British and French General Staffs had agreed upon Allied strategy. Their strategic appreciation was : "The integrity of Singapore was the key to the strategical situation in the Indian Ocean, Far East and Australasia and also that we must be prepared at some time to send naval reinforcements to Singapore." At the moment the two allies were unable to determine the priorities in respect of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Far Eastern waters. But it was clear that they attached greater value to the Eastern Mediterranean than to the Far East, and were prepared to abandon temporarily naval control in the Far Eastern waters. Their relations with Japan were not quite happy; but Japan was at the moment involved in China and the Russo-German Pact was likely to rouse Japanese apprehensions. Hence the British General Staff did not expect any immediate entry of Japan into the war, and, therefore, in their state of comparative unpreparedness they could afford to attach a lower priority to the Far Eastern waters.

The two Powers had agreed on a disposition of their navies. Zones of operations for the two navies had been agreed upon in respect of the Channel, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. On

land their strategy was primary to maintain the integrity of French territory. They would take action to stop the German advance in case Hitler invaded the Low Countries. The British army was to fight in France. In addition the British had decided to maintain an adequate army in the Middle East comprising the eastern area of the Mediterranean. Egypt was of immense strategic importance both from the army and air aspect. "Control of the Suez Canal depended on control of Egypt and since the defences of Malta against air attack were inadequate, Alexandria was required as an operational base for the fleet." It was also decided to have sufficient troops in Egypt to stop any Italian invasion across the Western Desert. Palestine was also to be strengthened militarily so as to prevent any invasion of Egypt from the north and to operate as a base from which Egypt might be reinforced. Protection of Palestine was important for the safety of the oil pipelines running from Iraq. In view of Italy's assumed hostility Egypt acquired a very major place in British strategical calculations. Strength in Egypt would prevent Italy from using force in East Africa and thereby interfering with the use of the Red Sea route. The task of the British air force in Sudan, Aden, and East Africa was to counter an Italian attack in the Red Sea. In respect of India, early British strategic appreciation was that there would be no immediate danger to her frontiers or coasts, though such a possibility might not be absolutely ruled out. The British view was that the security of India depended on British control of the Indian Ocean and on the strength of her naval power there. Of course the use of India as a base and a provider of troops and supplies was fully realised.

Hitler very well knew that for the success of his plans of expansion in the east a war with the Western Powers would be inevitable. He was also conscious of the delay in the rearmament of France and the military weakness of England and was confident that these two Powers would not be in a position to take offensive action against him when he was involved in crushing Poland. All that he feared was, as mentioned earlier, the active opposition of Russia which he silenced by signing the Non-Aggression Pact with her on 23 August 1939. With this development it was easier for him now to turn all his might against Poland which must have remained hostile to him in case he turned against the west, which was his intention earlier. In August the political and military situation was favourable for a war against Poland, and he decided to launch his attack on that country by the end of that month. At that date he was able to mobilise "besides fortress and frontier units, 105 division—6 panzer or armoured, 4 'light', 4 motorised, 3 mountain, and the remaining 88 infantry." Of these, all the mechanized and thirty-five of the



infantry divisions were fully trained and of high quality. The army was equipped with new and efficient weapons, the tactics were novel and the fighting spirit and discipline of the troops were of a high order. Most of the "younger men were animated by a fanatical resolve to avenge the humiliations of the recent past and demonstrated the conquering qualities of the resurgent German volk".<sup>3</sup> Hitler's navy was not very strong in numbers but it consisted of some of the latest battleships and there was a programme of constructions which when completed by 1944 would convert the German navy into a most formidable threat to the British navy. The air force had been built up to an immense strength and it had demonstrated its efficiency in the Spanish Civil War as also in actions in Central Europe. With this strong force and confident of the enthusiasm and loyalty of the German people, Hitler decided to hurl his mighty army against Poland on the 31st of August.

The Polish war, in the absence of any Western support, and owing to the agreement to partition the country between Russia and Germany, was bound to be a short affair. Germany had thrown 45 divisions—not a large force but "superbly equipped and incomparably better staffed"—against a Polish force of not more than 30 infantry divisions, 10 reserve divisions, 11 cavalry brigades, 38 companies of tanks and 377 aircraft. The whole of this force could never be mobilized and brought into action against the Germans. The Poles were weak in heavy, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery. Their infantry weapons were of poor quality and small calibre. The army lacked mobility and there was "deplorable lack of aircraft". The sudden and quick action on the part of the Germans prevented the completion of Polish mobilisation. The blitzkrieg tactics of the German army, which was spearheaded by a heavy air attack, led to deep penetration of the armoured forces, the panzer divisions, right into the heart of Poland. Within two days "the Polish war brain" was paralysed, and within three weeks the whole of the country was lying low at the feet of the conqueror. The misery of the Poles was aggravated by the Russian advance westwards so that the country was divided once again between the two conquerors—Russia and Germany—along the line of the Vistula.

The Polish campaign, while it destroyed Poland as a fighting force, left no deep scars on the German military strength. Hitler had maintained all the time a strong army on his western front facing the French armies and now, with the absolute discomfiture of his eastern enemy and being quite at ease on his eastern frontier, he was able to divert the mass of his army on to the western

3. *Grand Strategy*, II—p. 59.

frontier. Not more than 20 divisions were left in the east to maintain control over occupied Poland and to keep watch on the Russians in the east.

The first phase of the war was over and on 6th October Hitler was in a position to propose terms of peace to the Western Powers. Meanwhile, England had sent a British Expeditionary Force of 158000 men to France. The French had manned their Maginot Line—"the strongest defences yet conceived by the ingenuity of man", "steel hard, steel entrenched human fortress". On the sea the battle of the Atlantic had opened with the sinking of the *Athenia* by a German U-boat. This was the beginning of a much graver action and losses to the British on the seas. The British air force began the war with an attack on German warships in their harbours and by scattering leaflets over Germany. Fuller writes that : "So bloodless a war had not been seen since the battles of Molinella and Zagonara." For some months, so far as the Western Powers did go, they were not strained militarily and, on the western front, there seemed to be a stalemate, neither party striving to gain any major advantage on the other.

This period was utilized by the British Government to organise their war machine, to develop the political organisation for an efficient conduct of war, to build up an effective civil defence which, however, took some time to be brought into full gear. The children were evacuated from the cities and rationing of food was initiated. Control of labour, transport, foreign investments as well as a rigid control over agriculture and many other aspects of the civic and economic life of the people were devised. The United Kingdom also developed its war propaganda machine which is a very important aspect of modern warfare.

Britain was assured of the co-operation and help of the self-governing Dominions which one by one declared war on Germany. Only the Irish Free State remained neutral. The Dominions raised expeditionary forces and within a short time Canadian troops had reached England. By February 1940 the Australian and New Zealand forces had arrived in Egypt. As has been mentioned earlier, India was declared to be a belligerent by the British Government and all its resources were to be utilized for the purposes of the British war. The British War Office had decided to expand their military strength by raising 55 new divisions, of which 4 were to be raised in India. The British industrial potential was now directed towards the manufacture of armaments, which was bound to take some time to be in a position to fully equip the increasing military strength of England besides supplying equipment for the expanding army of India and the Dominions.

With the destruction of Poland the Germans transferred a large force to the west. A reorganisation of the army was also undertaken. New divisions were being created and the light ones were being converted into armoured divisions. But immediately there was no visible expression of German desire to mount an offensive against the Western Powers. People expected some peace proposals; but in his speech at Danzig on 19th September, Hitler did not give expression to any such proposals. All he said was that Germany "had no war aims against France and Great Britain. If they continued to fight they were the war-mongers." A few days later, the German and Soviet Governments issued a declaration of their desire to put an end to the war; "if they failed France and Great Britain would be responsible for its continuance and the eastern Powers would consult with regard to necessary measures." On 6th October however Hitler specifically made a peace offer in his speech to the Reichstag. He affirmed Germany's desire to live at peace with the world and said he had no demands on France. All that he wanted was that Great Britain should restore German colonies, but there was no ultimatum as such. He proposed "negotiation for a settlement of economic problems, for a reduction of armaments and for the further humanising of war." However, he threatened that "if Churchill and his friends wanted a war which would reduce Europe to ruins they should have it."<sup>4</sup> There was no sympathetic response to this offer on the part of England or France. It is true that in England there was not much of enthusiasm for war, and the Prime Minister received a large number of letters asking him to stop the war. The Dominion Governments also were not in favour of a purely negative answer and they were keen that war aims should be clearly defined and that neutral Powers might be invited to the peace conference which may have to be held eventually. In spite of this, on 12th October, the British Prime Minister rejected the peace offer perhaps in the confident hope that they could divide the German Government and her people. With this rejection of the peace offer, Hitler, in one of his directives, expressed his determination to take to the offensive in a short time.

Immediately, however, there was no stiffening of German opposition on the western front, and for some months the war remained in the stage of *sitzkrieg* or phoney war. In winter Russia invaded Finland. The British and the French in their desire to intervene on behalf of the victim of Soviet Russia, broke the neutrality of Norway which they wanted to use as a base of operations. Norway was also important to the British for the purpose of preventing Swedish ore being transported to Germany through the Norwegian waters and its coastline and ports being used by the

4. *Grand Strategy*, II—p. 61.

German navy and air force against British shipping in the North Sea. British intervention, however, rung the doom of Norway and Denmark which were soon occupied by German troops, and by May 1940 the British had been compelled to break the siege of Narvik and withdraw their forces from Norway. The German fortress was now washed by the Norwegian waters and, except for the Low Countries and France, the whole of Europe seemed to be under the command of Hitler or on his side. Russia had signed a Non-Aggression Pact and seemed to be content with German advance westwards, Italy was friendly and Mussolini was watching the situation to make a bid for expansion eastwards or in Africa; Franco in Spain was benevolently neutral and the rest of Europe was under the heels of Hitler. The German Fuhrer very well realised that the maintenance of the existing situation or his expansion eastwards at the cost of the Balkan states and the Soviet Union would be possible only if England were eliminated as a possible adversary. France alone was incapable of resisting his might, Holland and Belgium were too weak to be taken notice of. The only enemy whose manpower, military resources and economic strength could seriously counteract the German supremacy of Europe was the United Kingdom who could always expect support from the United States of America and obtain the active co-operation of the Dominions and the dependencies in the British Empire. If, therefore, Britain were knocked out of the list before her strength had become a mighty stream and before she could gain the active support of the United States, German supremacy would remain unchallenged. Britain had ignored his peace offers and was showing greater resolve to fight him. Therefore to knock out Britain his next move was to overrun France and the Low Countries so as to have control of the Atlantic coast as the jumping off ground for an eventual invasion of Great Britain.

The Norwegian discomfiture created a crisis in British politics. Chamberlain's weak-kneed policy was vehemently criticized in the Parliament leading to his resignation and coming to office of Mr. Churchill as Prime Minister. Simultaneously Hitler launched his invasion of France by way of Belgium. Holland was occupied and Belgium was pierced through by the German panzer divisions. The Maginot Line was thus turned and the French army and the British Expeditionary Force in France faced the prospect of their rear being turned and suffering a decisive defeat. The Royal Air Force was unable to make much impression on the continent. The British Government therefore decided to withdraw their expeditionary force from France. Against heavy odds and in the face of strong opposition, the British force was withdrawn from Dunkirk; but the army returned to England without its armour and with the loss of much of its equipment. In June 1940, France

capitulated to the Germans, and up to the western coast the whole of Europe was under German occupation.

The terms of the armistice with France, as dictated by Hitler on 23rd of June, were severe and indicated German intention to use the French territory for further action against England. By these terms the Germans took over the northern half of the country and a coast strip averaging about 70 miles of the southern half. This enabled them to have possession of all the ports of France on the Atlantic coast as also on the Mediterranean. The Germans could use all the facilities in the occupied area and they were empowered to demand the surrender of all weapons and equipment as they might require. All defences were to be handed over to them in good condition. In addition the French forces were to be demobilised and disarmed. The French fleet was disarmed, and no ships were to leave the harbour. Italy also imposed certain terms on the defeated France which involved demilitarisation of zones in southern France as also in French North Africa and Somaliland. Thus defeated and humiliated unoccupied France was to be governed by a new Provisional French Government formed under Marshal Petain which moved to Vichy and functioned from there. This surrender by the French Government was not without protest, which was expressed by General de Gaulle who, in agreement with the British Government, announced his intention to set up a Provisional National Committee to strive for national independence and to collaborate with the Allies.

The exit of France was a severe blow to the British resolve to defeat Nazi aggression. But the new Government under Mr. Churchill was not disheartened, and the nation started strenuous preparations to face the German invasion which now seemed inevitable. The spirit of the people was fortified by the classic speech of Mr. Churchill in the House of Commons on 18 June. He said, "Hitler knows that he will have to break us or lose the war. If we stand up to him all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad sunlit uplands; but if we fail then the whole world, including the United States and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister and perhaps more prolonged by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore address ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth of Nations and Empire last for a thousand years, men will still say 'this was their finest hour'." This exhortation was in line with what Churchill had promised on his assuming the office of Prime Minister. On May 13 he had told the House of Commons that he had "nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." He declared his policy to be "to wage war by sea, land and air, with

all our might and with all the strength that God can give us." He declared his aim to be "victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

The defeat of France had brought ruin to the earlier strategy which had been planned, for the whole conception then was of the sharing of French and British responsibilities and resources. After the exit of France, the entire burden of fighting the Germans fell on the British Commonwealth. The danger was further aggravated by the entry of Italy into the war on the side of Germany. Mussolini had taken advantage of the rising tide of German victories and had entered the war as a belligerent. The Soviet Union also was not prepared at the moment to co-operate with England in breaking the German hegemony of Europe. The United States was nourishing its neutrality. There was hardly any friend on whom the United Kingdom could count and had, therefore, to depend on the Commonwealth and the Empire for continuing the fight, which Churchill had promised would continue till victory was achieved. All this time Churchill was keen for the United States support and was hoping for American entry into the war. On the other side of the Atlantic, there was sympathy for the British. The President of the United States, Mr. Roosevelt, had offered a hint to the British Ambassador, Lord Lothian, on 25 May, that "As things were going it seemed likely that Germany would challenge some vital American interest in the near future which was the condition necessary to make the United States enter the war with the necessary popular support and that opinion was rapidly changing as to what United States' vital interests were." Soon thereafter the President had consulted his military advisers on the means of making war material available to England, and necessary legislation was being drafted for being introduced into the Congress. The President had also agreed that secret Staff talks might take place between the navies and the air forces of the two countries. There was also a willing response to Churchill's request for destroyers, and in exchange for certain bases which the United States so much desired on the Atlantic, 50 destroyers were placed at the disposal of the British navy. In Great Britain itself the industrial machinery was now geared to produce aeroplanes, tanks, heavy artillery and equipment in an increasing measure for the expanding armed forces. Commonwealth forces were also brought to England or had been stationed in the Middle East, and promises of a larger military aid were being extended.

It was in this situation that Hitler decided to prepare for an invasion of England. On 16 July he wrote to his Chief of the General Staff that, "Since England, in spite of her military hopeless

situation, shows no signs of willingness to come to terms, I have decided to prepare a landing operation against England, and, if necessary, to carry it out. The aim is to eliminate the English homeland as a base for the carrying on of the war against Germany. The preparations for the entire operation must be completed by mid-August."<sup>5</sup> But before he could launch on a determined attack on 19 July, he once again threw peace feelers. He said, "In this hour I feel it to be my duty before my conscience to appeal once more to reason and common-sense of Great Britain. I see no reason why this war must go on." It was clear from his speech to the Reichstag that he wanted a negotiated peace with England; but if that was not possible then he would have a direct assault on Great Britain, and there might be the possibility of a long war. This appeal by Hitler did not find a sympathetic response in England and a war of annihilation was now launched. The German plan, known as SEALION, was to land two armies of 25 divisions on the southern coast of England, then advance north to cut London off from the west. For this purpose assault craft were to be assembled on the French coast, and the German *Luftwaffe* was to soften the British territory and defeat the Royal Air Force. The German Air Force had hoped, with its nearly 3000 machines, to destroy the Royal Air Force and paralyse the British fleet.

The Battle of Britain began with air raids on a limited scale extending to heavier attacks both by day and night, but the British fighters frustrated the designs of the German air force to destroy the will of the British to fight or to weaken its defences so as to permit of a successful landing operation. Meanwhile German preparations for assault across the Channel continued, but without much success. The date for the assault was shifted, and ultimately in October, the whole attack was called off. From August to October England was faced with a tremendous ordeal, and, ultimately, the determination of the people, a stern resolve of the Government, the strength and skill of the fighter force, helped the United Kingdom to escape defeat and destruction at the hands of the Germans.

The war in its early stages had very little impact on India. After declaring this land as a belligerent, the Government of India armed itself with punitive powers to deal with any major political opposition and subversive activities, but no action was taken in the economic or other fields. Nothing was done to control production or distribution of food or other necessities of life. Hardly any action was taken for the control of industry, which, in the initial stages of the war, was not geared to military production in this country. For many months Indians were not affected by the war

5. Quoted by Fuller, p. 86.

which even in Western Europe had remained comparatively bloodless.

Italy had not joined the war, and Russia had made no move towards West Asia. Japan also had kept out of the war in the beginning and was involved in the Chinese affair. Strategically, therefore, no major complications had arisen to affect India's security prejudicially. However, the General Staff and the Government of India had to reassess their defence arrangements. Prior to 1936 the only frontier which was vulnerable was the north-west frontier, and Soviet Russia was the main enemy against whom plans of defence had been contemplated. The Defence of India Plan, or the Pink Plan which had substituted it, had both assumed Soviet antagonism with or without the collaboration of Afghanistan, and military forces were assigned for the task of meeting invasion from beyond the Hindu Kush by advancing into Afghanistan and adopting offensive action in two sectors of that country—Kabul or Jalalabad in the north and Kandahar in the south. By the developments in 1936 and thereafter, with the formation of the Berlin-Rome Protocol and the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Italy, and Japan and Germany respectively, and the growing expansionism of the Axis Powers, the British Empire was faced with a new danger in the Middle and Far East. At the same time, owing to Italy's dreams of North African Empire, threatening Egypt and the Red Sea, and her activities in the Middle Eastern countries including Afghanistan, to which Italian air force had been supplied, a new danger seemed to loom in the horizon for India. This involved strengthening of British garrisons in the Middle East and stiffening of Indian defences on the north-west frontier. The Japanese southward policy directed towards economic expansion in the South Western Pacific threatened Singapore and Siam. These activities of the eastern partner of the Axis made India susceptible to danger from her eastern frontier also, and there was the possibility of seaborne attack on her extensive coastline, though its scope and weight might be limited. The situation in the Middle East also made it imperative for the British Government to adopt measures for the security of communications with the Persian Gulf and Palestine, and also the safety of British oil interests in Iraq and Iran.

This new threat to British interests in the Middle East and the Western Pacific imposed the liability on India to reinforce British garrisons in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Malaya and Hong Kong. The Government of India had accepted the responsibility of sending detachments to these areas to the extent of one division with ancillary troops. Before the war was declared the commitments were to despatch one infantry brigade, one field brigade Royal



Artillery and ancillary troops for the defence of the Anglo-Iranian oilfields; to reinforce the garrison of Singapore by despatching one infantry brigade and ancillary troops; to strengthen Hong Kong by the despatch of two battalions of infantry; to send two infantry brigades with ancillary troops for the reinforcement of British garrison in Egypt and to despatch one infantry brigade for the protection of Burma. In 1938, with the fast deteriorating international situation, danger was brought nearer to the shores of India. Hong Kong, Singapore and Burma in the east, and Egypt, Palestine, Somaliland, Aden, and Anglo-Iranian oilfields in Iraq and Iran and the Persian Gulf were the regions whose security was linked with the security of India. These were vital strategic points in whose defence India had the responsibility of playing a major part. On this ground the Chatfield Committee had made India jointly responsible with Britain for the protection of these areas which were regarded as sectors of external defence of India. The allocation of one division for this purpose was a definite liability on India, and besides that she had the indefinite obligation of rendering assistance to the British Government in case the latter was involved in a major war.

The earlier plans relating to north-western defence were revised in 1938 in the light of the worsening international situation and the obligations which had been imposed on India for external defence. The Pink Plan assuming offensive action in Afghanistan was now not practicable owing to the paucity of troops to implement it. A plan of operations known as Outline Plan was drafted, but before it was adopted a realistic appraisal of the war potential compelled increasing emphasis on the defensive aspect of operations in the north-west. Later an Interim Plan of Operations to meet a sudden emergency was issued, but before the end of the year this was also substituted by the Plan of Operations 1938 which remained in force at the commencement of the war in 1939. Both these plans were based on a purely defensive policy and excluded any idea of a large-scale offensive action into Afghanistan. The Plan of Operations 1938 was comprehensive enough to include, besides the defence of north-west frontier, internal security, coastal defence and the overseas commitments. To meet these obligations the army was grouped into six categories. The army units of these various categories were still unmechanised and remained so or very imperfectly mechanised for the first two years of the war.

In the 1938 plans local naval defence was assigned considerable importance, owing to the changed conditions as a result of the new international situation, wherein the British Empire was confronted with the probable hostility of naval Powers in the east. The naval strength of Italy and Japan in the Mediterranean and the Pacific, respectively, had increased maritime threat to India, and danger of

# OUTLINE PLAN OF OPERATIONS (INDIA)

1938

SCALE OF MILES



## COVERING TROOPS ALONG N.W. FRONTIER

CHITRAL DISTRICT ONE INF. BN.  
 PESHAWAR DISTRICT THREE INF. BDES  
 KOHAT DISTRICT TWO INF. BDES  
 WAZIRISTAN DISTRICT THREE INF. BDES  
 WESTERN INDEPENDENT DISTRICT THREE INF. BDES.

## INTERNAL SECURITY TROOPS

6 INDIAN CAVALRY REGIMENTS  
 32 BRITISH INFANTRY BATTALIONS  
 30 INDIAN INFANTRY BATTALIONS

## FIELD ARMY

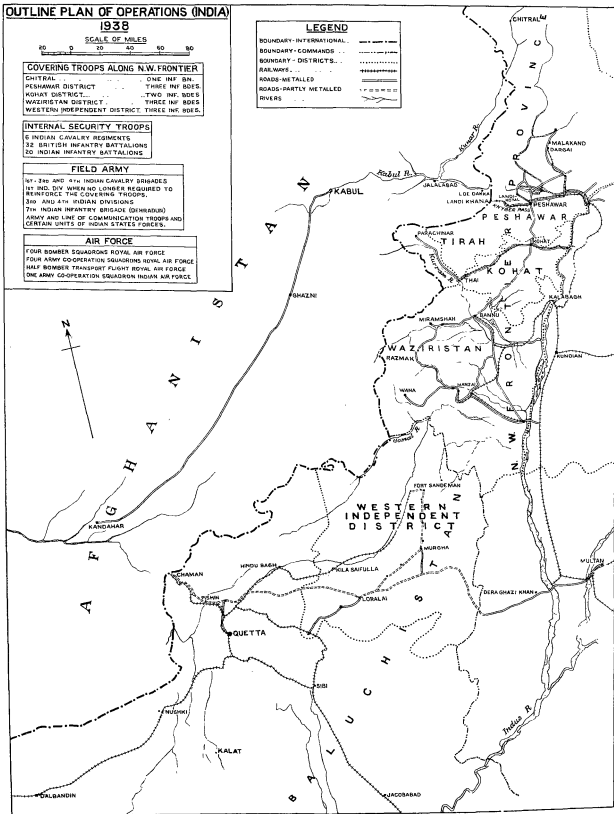
1ST, 2ND AND 4TH INDIAN CAVALRY BRIGADES  
 1ST, 2ND, 3RD AND 4TH DIVISIONS  
 7TH INDIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE (DIVISION)  
 ARMY AND LINE OF COMMUNICATION TROOPS AND  
 CERTAIN UNITS OF INDIAN STATES FORCES.

## AIR FORCE

FOUR BOMBER SQUADRONS ROYAL AIR FORCE  
 FOUR ARMY CO-OPERATION SQUADRONS ROYAL AIR FORCE  
 HALF BOMBER TRANSPORT FLIGHT ROYAL AIR FORCE  
 ONE ARMY CO-OPERATION SQUADRON INDIAN AIR FORCE

## LEGEND

BOUNDARY - INTERNATIONAL  
 BOUNDARY - COMMANDS  
 BOUNDARY - DISTRICTS  
 RAILWAYS  
 ROADS - METALLED  
 ROADS - PARTLY METALLED  
 RIVERS



seaborne aggression from Japan was not ruled out. The General Staff appreciation was that sporadic Japanese action against India might be anticipated. This may take the form of seaborne attack on ports and shipping with the object of inflicting moral and material damage, to induce the Government to lock up troops in India which might be better employed elsewhere, and interfere with trade. Raids by surface craft, by seaborne aircraft and submarine and mining activities were likely. While it might not involve a vital threat to the security of India, a serious danger to shipping, affecting the morale of the country, might still be the result. However, as long as Singapore continued to be the impregnable bastion of the Empire in the east, and Suez and Aden guarded the ingress to the Arabian Sea and the Royal Navy sailed the Indian Ocean, there was little danger of a seaborne invasion of India, and her coast was secure against external aggression. India had to depend entirely on the Royal Navy for her maritime protection against attacks by any major Power. Little could be done by her for the protection of her trade routes. All, therefore, that she could do on her own resources was to provide for local defence at important ports and find some aircraft for co-operating with the other services for coastal defence. For the safety of her lines of sea communications, which alone would enable her to obtain supplies and equipment for the armed forces from the United Kingdom, and the safety of trade routes, she had to depend mainly on the Royal Navy. In 1936 the Imperial Conference had made the Dominions and India responsible for their local naval defence and development of their navies. Accordingly by 1938 India had secured five sea-going sloops, a patrol vessel and a survey ship. But little had been achieved to afford protection to shipping in the immediate approaches to ports from submarines and mines. Negotiations were started with the Government of England, and in 1938 agreement was reached that India should maintain an ocean-going squadron of not less than six modern escort vessels which would co-operate with the Royal Navy. The Chatfield Committee had recommended expansion of the Royal Indian Navy by the construction of escort vessels, trawlers, minesweepers, etc. These recommendations were expected to provide minimum insurance, the six sloops being for the protection of sea communications and the four minesweepers to be available for keeping the ports clear and open. There was also provision for taking over of 48 merchant vessels in time of war, 25 of which were to be fitted as auxiliary minesweepers and 23 as auxiliary anti-submarine craft. This provision was adequate for the defence of the ports and their immediate approaches, but it did not abrogate the necessity of depending on the Royal Navy. However, the Indian coast and her sea routes were now to be made comparatively secure against minor attacks which alone were envisaged at the moment.

The situation in 1939, when the war opened, was that both in the matter of her defence policy and in respect of the danger to her security and her competence to meet it, India was passing through a period of change and transition. The traditional basis on which defence plans had been made had been exploded by the new international situation which had brought forth new enemies for the British Empire. The naval strength of Japan and Italy whose fleets were massing in the Pacific and the Mediterranean, respectively, had made the Indian waters insecure. The danger to Malaya, Siam and Indo-China from Japan's unveiled hostility to the British Empire had brought nearer the danger of air attacks on India and Burma. On the western side also the fear of invasion was no small one. Afghanistan was in close liaison with Italy, and there was fear that she might be drawn into the Axis net and thus afford to the Axis Powers military bases in the neighbourhood of India. Iraq and Iran were also increasingly being attracted towards the Axis. Their continuance in the British sphere of influence and military control over them had become the *sine qua non* of India's security. In the British eyes, therefore, India's security was identified with the British hold over the Middle East and the Far East. This had thrown a new responsibility on India for the protection of the so-called vital points of her external defence. By 1939, thus, India was not only responsible for the defence of her own frontiers but had the added liability of active participation in the protection of Indian waters and the surrounding countries of Malaya, Burma, the Persian Gulf area, Aden, Somaliland, Palestine and Egypt. The Indian forces were drafted for garrison purposes to serve in these regions both in the east and the west. There was also the prospect of Indian army being requisitioned for service overseas in an emergency in the interest of the British Empire. Nevertheless, the north-west frontier was as usual the vital spot whose protection was the primary responsibility of the Indian forces. Fear of Soviet Russia, the threatening mien of the Axis Powers, the uncertainty of the attitude of the Afghan Government and the recurring hostility of the frontier tribes made it impossible to relax vigilance in that region. The north-east frontier had been neglected so far, for there was no danger of any hostile incursion from that side. But with the emergence of Japan as a hostile power, the threat to Burma had increased and in her own interest India could not leave Burma to her own resources which were extremely meagre. Adequate assistance to the eastern neighbour was, therefore, essential; and some of the proposals before 1939 did comprehend this responsibility as well. However, there was no effective insurance on the north-eastern side. Coastal defence had been taken up, but it was neither adequate nor competent to ensure complete security. By 1939 little had been done to provide for air defence, but the danger of air attacks had

increased. Internal security was also a major problem which could not be neglected. With all these commitments the Indian army was ill-equipped and not too numerous to undertake successfully all the obligations imposed on her.

When the war opened in September, the danger to India's security had not immediately increased. The early campaigns were confined to Europe, and German action did not threaten at this stage the integrity of the Indian frontiers. The other two members of the Axis—Italy and Japan—abstained from joining the war for some time. But the German or Italian activities in the Middle East and the Soviet pact with Germany created the suspicion that Russia might be hostile to the Western Powers and that she might take to aggression in Central Asia with the object of causing discomfiture to the Government of India. The growing Axis influence in the Middle East also threatened, though not immediately, the coming of the war nearer to the frontiers of India. However, till about the end of 1940 no serious danger developed in the vicinity of the Indian frontiers. The Government of India, therefore, could utilise this period of quiescence to reorganise their defences in the north-west and reconsider the plan of defence.

In these months the equivocal attitude of Russia created anxiety for the defence of the north-west frontier. The Government of India feared Russian aggression against Afghanistan or Iran which, though it did not materialize, certainly could not permit of any complacency regarding the security of India's frontiers. The defence of the north-west frontier, therefore, assumed the same importance as it had in the pre-war period, and for some time the entire war preparations of India were turned westwards.

The traditional policy, namely, "to maintain and strengthen indigenous states on Indian perimeter and to keep great Powers off the Indian glacis" was again in operation. The integrity of Afghanistan became an essential object of Indo-British policy, and the plans made in this period revolved round this primary purpose. The danger to Afghanistan was considered to be of a dual nature : firstly, Soviet aggression in the form of air or land attacks, and secondly, internal disruption as a consequence of the Axis fifth-column activities. The General Staff based their appreciation on the threat of a land advance into the northern province of Afghanistan or towards Herat as also bombing of Kabul and landing of parachute troops in its vicinity. They felt that such developments in that country might involve the insecurity of India. Impelled by these considerations, early in March 1940, the Government of India emphasised the necessity of maintaining "the integrity of Afghanistan and to do everything possible to keep Russia from every approach to India" and desired "that to this end some assur-

ance should be given that His Majesty's Government would meet Soviet aggression on Afghanistan by declaration of war." The Government of India favoured concluding of a pact with the Afghan Government and extending of secret assurances to it that Soviet aggression would be countered by a declaration of war against her. This position was further emphasised in their telegram to the Secretary of State on 22 March 1940. The Government of India requested the British Government to determine unequivocally its policy in regard to Afghanistan, Iran and the Persian Gulf regions with special reference to the Russian menace. The need for a clear enunciation of policy in respect of Afghanistan had been accentuated by the desire of the Viceroy to placate Muslim opinion in India and also in order that adequate military equipment might be made available to India to enable her to play an effective part in matters affecting her external defence. The British Government in their reply expressed the view that "If Russia would be allowed to overcome Afghanistan without giving the latter our active support, the resulting threats to India, both material and moral, and consequent strain on our resources would be such as greatly to outweigh any risks which might have to be incurred in supporting Afghan resistance with our own armed forces before it was too late." Hence they decided that in the event of Russian aggression against Afghanistan it would be British policy to render full support to the Afghan Government. Also that the Afghan Government should be given an assurance immediately that in the event of Soviet forces being directed against Afghan independence or the integrity of their country, the Government of India would be prepared to give all assistance, including the immediate provision of assistance by land forces in addition to air support. The Government of India was also asked to consider measures which might be adopted immediately in India to counter Russian aggression.

A plan, known as Plan A of 1940, was prepared by the General Staff and communicated to the Secretary of State on 15 May 1940 for submission to the Chiefs of Staff. This plan was based on the assumption that the assurance given to Afghanistan of support was a definite commitment for which adequate military provision would have to be made; secondly, that this policy would involve changing over to an offensive policy from the defensive one in force at the moment. Thirdly, the plan took cognizance of the danger of subversive activity by the Germans threatening the stability of Afghan Government. Fourthly, that India will have to bear, in addition, the burden of fulfilling her obligations in the Middle East which had been entered into earlier. The plan envisaged simultaneous advance on two lines : (i) the northern, to support the Government in Kabul, and (ii) on the southern side, to forestall

Soviet troops on the Helmand line and to stabilise Kandahar area. The land forces required for this dual purpose were three infantry divisions plus ancillary troops on the northern line, four infantry brigades and three mobile brigades with other troops on the southern line, and one division as general reserve. This would commit the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Indian Infantry Divisions in addition to the 5th Infantry Division which might be in reserve till the time that it was called upon to serve overseas, and thereafter the 10th Indian Division was to be in the reserve. The air requirements were calculated as 21 squadrons. To equip this force and make it available for action, the British Government had to provide all mobile anti-aircraft, some static and anti-aircraft artillery and personnel, 14 squadrons of aircraft and sufficient armaments, technical equipment and about 100 sections of vehicles. This force might be ready by May 1941 for operation in the north-west. In case, however, the danger became real in 1940, India would not be able to fulfil her commitments of reinforcing the British troops in Iran and Iraq. It was also made clear that in case Soviet aggression did not materialize this expanded force might be available for use in other theatres.

The Commander-in-Chief issued a directive on 21 May 1940 for the raising of necessary forces to implement the plan and this became the basis of expansion of the armed forces in 1940-41 and was incorporated in the Expansion Plan, 1940. The definite political object of this plan was to support Afghanistan while the military object was to resist Soviet armed aggression. The plan for the assistance of Afghanistan, or Plan A, was adopted by the Army Headquarters, and provisionally 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions together with Force Troops were earmarked for the task. The main base was fixed at Lahore and advanced bases were to function at Peshawar and Quetta. Before, however, this plan was brought into effect the international situation had so altered as to compel its abeyance and the formulation of an Interim Plan, less comprehensive in its nature. After the defeat of Norway, Holland, Belgium and France and the return of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk, the British position had considerably deteriorated in the Middle East and the Germans had taken full advantage of this decline in their prestige. In consequence the Afghan Government hesitated to accept British offers of military and economic assistance. The German prestige had considerably increased and conviction of a German victory was fast growing. The Government of Afghanistan was reluctant to commit itself openly to the British side, though it did not abrogate its association with the Government of India. The change in the European situation altered the incidence of danger for India also. Instead of Soviet Russia, Germany was now considered to be the chief menace to India's security, and the main fear was the

expansion of German influence in Afghanistan which would be pregnant with dangerous possibilities for the security of India. The British Government was also not in a position to render effective aid in the matter of equipment and arms to India and could not absolve the Government of India of its responsibility to despatch troops to the Middle East. Hence the whole basis of Plan A had been exploded, and a new plan less ambitious and with different objects had become necessary.

On 3rd June 1940, the Secretary of State informed the Government of India that the War Cabinet would not be able to supply air force or army equipment, and hence an interim plan based entirely on the resources available in India should be prepared and the operations should be confined to Kabul area alone. The Interim Plan as prepared by the General Staff was based on the principle of gaining depth for defence and denying to the Soviet forces such areas as might facilitate attacks on India. The military object was defined as to deny to the hostile forces the use of such areas in Afghanistan as might be in close proximity to the Indian frontier from which land and air attack might develop and to stabilize those areas so as to form them into a base for further military and political action. These areas were Jalalabad and Kandahar-Helmand area. Limited advance to these geographical limits was included in the plan. The new plan was issued on 10 July 1940. It was known as the Interim Plan and was based on a defensive-offensive strategy, viz. the immediate defence of the frontier which included local offensives wherever circumstances permitted and adequate forces were available. Necessary troops were assigned for this plan, and included three infantry divisions, two infantry brigades and one mobile division.

Even while the Interim Plan was being discussed, the international situation had changed so rapidly and considerably that a fresh and thorough examination of defence policy had again become necessary. The main element in the new situation was the threatening attitude of Italy. Besides, position in Egypt, Iraq and Turkey was not clear, while in Syria, as a result of the capitulation of France, position had altered so as to threaten the land route and the oil pipelines in that region. Japan also was prepared to take full advantage of the fall of France to assume possession of the French colonies in East Asia. The situation, therefore, had so changed as to make the basis on which the Interim Plan was formed completely out of date. To the problematical danger of Soviet invasion was now added the certainty of trouble in the Middle East involving primarily a threat to the British interests in that region, and secondarily, a threat to the defences of India, both land and sea. The General Staff in India was also keen to afford maximum military support to the British Government by despatching all



available forces for employment in Egypt, Iraq and Iran. There was also the necessity of providing for internal security of India and her ports, because on the full mobilisation of her economic and military resources alone depended the possibility of rendering effective assistance to the British Government. The internal political situation in the country was also not very reassuring. The limited military resources in the country were inadequate for implementing the Interim Plan as well as strengthening the frontier and rendering support to His Majesty's Government. Hence the Interim Plan was dropped even before it had been fully formulated.

In his note to the Viceroy, dated 11 July 1940, the Commander-in-Chief mentioned that as against the situation underlying the Interim Plan the position had so deteriorated in the Middle East as to enable the German land and air forces to establish themselves in areas from which a direct attack on India might be launched. He also apprehended that in that eventuality Soviet Russia might attack India to forestall Germany or do so in collusion with the Nazis. This might increase the extent of danger and direct threat to India from the west. Therefore, he felt that it was essential to reconsider the whole position without absolutely overthrowing either Plan A or Interim Plan which might be useful in certain contingencies for the security of the western frontier. On this basis he outlined the future policy as : “(1) To proceed with all preparations on the lines of the Interim Plan so that in case of an attack, if the circumstances were favourable, a preliminary advance by light forces beyond the frontier might be effected. (2) The main battle area would be the western frontier mountain belt where alone would it be possible to check mechanized and armoured forces for some considerable time. This battle area would comprise all territory beyond the Indus. (3) The lines of approach to the mountain belt lie in the areas of the Khyber, Kurram Salient and on the east Persian frontier in the neighbourhood of Duzdab and Mirzawa. In these areas it would be necessary to strengthen the means of resistance by preparing anti-tank obstacles and defences and arrangements for demolition in depth. (4) That in case it was not possible to hold the mountain belt, the next defensive area would be to the east of the line of the Indus.” In accordance with this policy orders were issued for preparing comprehensive plans for secret reconnaissance and to prepare major bridges for demolition.

In pursuance of the directive of the Commander-in-Chief, the Northern Command submitted an Outline Defence Plan which became the basis of defence preparations ultimately in that sector. This plan was designed to meet Soviet or German aggression aided by a hostile Afghanistan and serious tribal disorders and internal disaffection. The object of the plan was to defeat the hostile

attack as near the frontier as possible, for which defences were organised from the Durand Line to the Indus river so as to cover all practicable approaches, primarily against attack by armoured fighting vehicles supported by air force and followed by other land forces. The plan was divided into sectors, one covering the defence of the forward zone, and the other, the rear or the Indus zone. In the northern sector the most vital line was that of the Khyber Pass and, therefore, it was proposed to make its approaches impregnable to attack by modern forces. Anti-tank blocks were to be constructed on the road and sufficient land forces were to be disposed in that area. Construction of static defences and the garrisoning of the main posts as well as defence of the main lines of communication by adequate land forces was provided for.

In addition to the defence of the forward area, the defence of the Indus zone was also examined. The intermediary zone did not admit of effective defence, hence it was suggested that the bridge-heads should be planned on the western bank of the Indus which might be defended also from the eastern bank at Attock, Kushalgarh and Kalabagh. In addition to the static installations a mobile force of the strength of one infantry brigade was to be maintained to strike at any hostile force which might dare infiltrate across the frontier. For the protection of the gaps, particularly the one between Bunar hills and Attock, the use of medium artillery, flooding and manning of outposts on the right bank were some of the means which were adopted. The main defence was to be provided on the left bank of the Indus river in the form of concealed concrete machine-gun emplacements, field regiments and medium battery positions and mobile forces to counter any attempt at crossing.

This Outline Plan formed the basis of the Defence Plan 1940 which ultimately developed in the Defence Plan, 1941. It was a comprehensive plan of defence on all fronts. Immediately however, the organisation of defence and construction of works in depth from the Indo-Afghan and Indo-Iranian frontiers to the river Indus were taken up, and the Northern Command and the Western Independent District were directed to submit comprehensive schemes of defence works, anti-tank defences, block-houses, demolitions, etc. These were to be fully prepared. In August 1940, Rs. 50,000 were allotted for preliminary work on the anti-tank defences of the Khyber, and another similar sum was allotted for the Khojak and Bogra areas. The full estimates for the defence works in the northern and southern areas came to Rs. 282 and 98 lakhs, respectively. As reinforcements two divisions were allotted to the Northern Command and one division plus one infantry brigade to the Western Independent District. Their role was to

man the forward defences or to undertake local and limited counter-strokes. One armoured division and two infantry divisions were maintained as a reserve in the Army Headquarters. Thus in 1940, at the time that the crisis in the European war had thickened India had to take recourse only to static defences on her north-western frontier to meet the possibility of a German or Russian aggression from that direction.

Before October 1940, when the Battle of Britain had practically petered out, India, in the absence of any immediate aggression on her frontiers, was busy planning her north-western defences and manning the defence of her coastline, which was largely of a static nature, besides the employment of the limited resources of the Royal Indian Navy. When war was declared in September 1939, 45 merchant ships were taken over for auxiliary duties. These with the ships of the Royal Indian Navy were deemed initially adequate for keeping the ports free and for maintaining the sea channels and the trade routes secure from any hostile encroachments. In the first year of the war also schemes were developed for extending the land and air forces. The Expansion Plan of 1940 provided for an increase of 50,000 men to the land forces, recruitment for which was taken up in earnest. The manufacturing and other resources of the country were also utilized for military purposes, though, without adequate supplies of equipment and war material from the United Kingdom, it was not possible to expand the army. India had also fulfilled her initial obligation of sending troops to the Middle East and the outposts in the eastern waters. Troops had been sent to Egypt, the Persian Gulf area, Singapore and Hong Kong. The war machinery had been organised, but in the absence of any immediate threat or any major demand on her resources, this machinery did not expand or develop visibly.

In the political field the first year of the war was one of stalemate. The political deadlock could not be resolved and no decisive steps were taken to win over the willing co-operation of the Indian people in the war effort of the Allies. Prior to the declaration of war, on 11 August 1939, the Congress Working Committee had adopted a resolution declaring its active opposition to any imperialist war and expressed its resolve to resist any attempt to drag India into the war. The despatch of troops to Egypt and Singapore was condemned. The Committee further reminded "Provincial Governments to assist in no way the war preparations of the British Government and to keep in mind the policy laid down by the Congress to which they must adhere. If the carrying out of this policy leads to resignations or the removal of the Congress ministers, they must prepare for this contingency." This was an unambiguous declaration of the Congress policy not to co-operate in the war effort unless India's political aspirations had been con-

ceded. The Muslim League also made its support contingent on the demands of Muslim India being met without delay. The Government on its part wanted to arm itself with full authority to co-ordinate the activities of the Central and Provincial Governments. This was achieved by the Parliament passing a Bill empowering the Central Government to give directions to a Province about the manner in which its executive authority would be exercised and also to make laws conferring executive authority in respect of provincial subjects on the Central Government. This new law was objected to by the Congress as striking at the very basis of provincial autonomy and rendering it a farce in case of war, "which in effect creates a war dictatorship of the Central Government of India and which makes Provincial Governments helpless agents of imperialism." This Bill would enable the Central Government to proceed ahead in its war efforts, irrespective of the attitude of the Congress ministries in the provinces.

After the declaration of the war the Viceroy met Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah to secure their co-operation for the war effort which could not be available immediately. Within the next few days the Central Legislature passed the Defence of India Bill and the Congress Party abstained from attending the session. On 11 September the Viceroy announced the postponement of the Federation in order to secure the co-operation of the Princes and the Muslim League.

There was ample sympathy for the British cause in the country. It was aptly expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru in his statement that "In a conflict between democracy and freedom on the one side and fascism and aggression on the other, our sympathies must inevitably lie on the side of democracy. I should like India to play her full part and throw all the resources into the struggle for a new order." This sentiment was officially emphasised by the Congress Working Committee in its Resolution of 14 September. The Working Committee expressed sympathy with the democracies and condemned Nazi aggression, but, at the same time, declared that India could not associate herself with the fight for democratic freedom so long as that was denied to her. The resolution further declared that the war measures taken by the Government of India did not have the consent of the Indian people and were against their wishes. It further expressed the preparedness of the Congress to co-operate with the British Government and its allies in removing fascism and imperialism, but before it did so it invited the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms its war aims in regard to democracy and imperialism and in particular how those were going to apply to India. The resolution further stressed: "the real test of any declaration is its application in the present, for it is the present that will govern action today and also give shape to the future."

This resolution did not have the support of Mahatma Gandhi who was prepared to render unconditional support to the United Kingdom, but he also stated that the recognition of India's independence was a natural corollary of the British profession regarding democracy. The Muslim League also outlined its policy in the resolution of its Working Committee of 18 September. It expressed sympathy with the Allied cause but emphasised that Muslim support could be available to the British Government only on two conditions : (i) that the Muslims were given a fair play in the Congress provinces, and (ii) that an assurance was given that no constitutional advance in India would be made or any constitution framed without the consent and approval of the Muslim League.

While the Polish war was proceeding and the Nazi victory was a definite certainty in the east, the Government of India and the British Government, in the absence of any pressing need for accommodation with the Indian political parties, were content to discuss with Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders the evolving of some mode by which India's co-operation might be available for the war without Great Britain conceding any radical constitutional advance. In the discussions which were held at this time it was clear that the Congress insisted on "full-blooded, positive and unambiguous declaration" of "absolute freedom for India" at the end of the war, and that she should have the liberty to frame her constitution by means of a Constituent Assembly. The Congress had also taken stand on a national government almost of the cabinet type being established in the intervening period for the conduct of the war, which alone would be able to associate public opinion with the Allied cause. This view was not shared by the Muslim League which emphasised the communal differences and would not be prepared to accept any political settlement which did not safeguard effectively the interests of the Muslims. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State were prepared to make a limited advance by including some popular representatives on the Executive Council and creating some machinery by which Indian opinion might be reflected on the defence policies.

The All India Congress Committee which met on 10 October endorsed the resolution passed by the Working Committee in September and repeated that the British Government should declare its war aims. It further stressed that "India must be declared as an independent nation and present application must be given to this status to the largest extent possible." On 17 October the British policy was declared in a statement issued by the Viceroy. He referred to the Prime Minister's statement on the British war aims and said : "This statement clearly establishes the nature of the cause for which we are fighting, and justifies, if justification is

needed, the extension by India of her moral support and her goodwill to the prosecution of that cause." About India's constitutional future he said that the attainment of Dominion Status was the natural issue of India's political progress, and gave an undertaking on the authority of His Majesty's Government "that at the end of the war we are willing to enter into consultation with representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in India and with the Indian Princes with a view to securing their aid and co-operation in the framing of such modifications in the plan embodied in the Government of India Act as might seem desirable."<sup>6</sup> To assure closer association of the Indian public opinion with the prosecution of the war, the Viceroy announced that he would set up a consultative group representing the major political parties and the Indian Princes under his presidentship. "This consultative group would be summoned at his invitation and would have as its object the association of public opinion in India with the conduct of the war and with questions relating to war activities."<sup>7</sup> This statement of British policy, if it was seriously intended to assuage the Indian political feelings, was scarcely adequate to achieve that purpose. It is not surprising therefore that the Congress Working Committee condemned it and the Muslim League also could not give an assurance of support and co-operation.

Subsequent statement by Sir Samuel Hoare in the Parliament expressing the desire of His Majesty's Government under certain conditions to associate Indian opinion with the conduct of the war, by expanding the Viceroy's Executive Council, was certainly an advance on the Viceroy's statement; but it also failed to placate the political opinion in the country. The result was that the Congress asked its ministries in the provinces to resign by 31 October, compelling the enforcement of Section 93 of the Government of India Act by which the Governors assumed full charge of the Government in the seven Congress provinces. This lack of willingness to concede even slightly to the political demand of India can be explained only by the absence of any pressure of war in Europe at the moment on the British Government which did not feel the necessity of satisfying the Indian political aspirations in order to gain active support of the country in its war effort. In the phoney war there was no compelling element to persuade the British Government or the Government of India to satisfy the Congress demand, and for some months the deadlock continued. The only result of it was that, on the one hand, the strain between the Muslim League and the Congress was growing, the demands of the Muslim League were stiffening and the Congress was feeling a sense of frustration. There was also no prospect of the diffe-

6 Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, p. 66.

7 *Ibid*, p. 6

rences between the Congress and the Muslim League being bridged. Moreover, the other parties such as the Liberals, the Scheduled Castes, the Hindu Mahasabha etc. were also contesting the political lead of the Congress and were prepared to render co-operation to the Government without insisting on any political *quid pro quo*.

The Congress attitude was further defined at the Ramgarh session of the Congress in March 1940. The only one resolution passed at that session related to India's attitude to the war. There was a severe indictment of British rule and a clear reiteration of the inability of the Congress to take part in a war which was being fought for the furtherance of imperialist purposes. The goal of complete independence was reaffirmed and the demand for the Constituent Assembly was emphasised. It further stressed that "the withdrawal of Congress ministries must naturally be followed by civil disobedience to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough for the purpose or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis." On the other hand, Muslim opinion was crystallizing in favour of a partition of the country, and the Muslim League in its Lahore Session, at the end of March, adopted a resolution which has generally come to be known as the Pakistan Resolution. It sought "that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign." Thus, at the beginning of April, 1940 when the war moved to Western Europe, the situation in India was that the Congress threatened civil disobedience while the Muslim League claimed the partition of the country in the interest of the security of the Muslims. In this definite cleavage of opinion among the political parties the Viceroy adopted a policy of wait and see. The White Paper issued on 10 April provided justification for the continuance of Section 93 proclamations in the seven provinces, the plea being the cleavage between the various interests in the country. However, on 18 April, the Secretary of State in his speech in the House of Lords, reiterated the resolve of His Majesty's Government to respect the undertaking given "to examine the constitutional field in consultation with representatives of all parties and interests in India" in respect of future constitution of the country. He further said, "admittedly a substantial measure of agreement amongst the communities in India is essential if the vision of a united India which has inspired the labours of so many Indians and Englishmen is to become a reality, for I cannot believe that any government or parliament in this country would attempt to impose by force upon 80 million Muslim subjects of His

Majesty in India, a form of constitution under which they would not live peacefully and contentedly." This was to satisfy Mr. Jinnah's demand for an assurance that no constitution would be enforced on the Muslims without their consent. The deadlock was thus complete. The events, however, were pointing to a direction for the resolution of the stalemate.

Hitler's invasion of Norway and Denmark in April 1940 and the subsequent invasion of Holland and Belgium, which surrendered without much of resistance, led ultimately to the turning of the Maginot Line and an attack on France. The French collapse was fairly rapid and the Government in France accepted an armistice and capitulated on 17 June. Meanwhile, in May, subsequent to the Norwegian discomfiture there was change in the government of England. Sir Neville Chamberlain was replaced by Mr. Winston Churchill as the Prime Minister and Mr. Amery became Secretary of State for India. The fast developing events in Europe compelled the British Parliament to pass an Act providing for the transfer of the powers of the Secretary of State to the Governor-General in the event of a complete breakdown of communications with the United Kingdom. In India also there was some panic, but there was no immediate crisis. The attitude of the people and the political parties was one of sympathy for the Allied cause. The Congress was in no mood to cause embarrassment to the British Government in their then predicament. Mahatma Gandhi said, "I am of the opinion that we should wait till the heat of the battle in the heart of the Allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is. We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin; that is not the way of non-violence." Other leaders also were not prepared to take advantage of England's difficulties. There was no whittling of the demand for independence, but it could wait. The attitude of the Muslim League also was not unfavourable, and Lord Linlithgow felt that he could carry on the Government on the existing basis during the war. The Viceroy, however, was not quite correct in his appreciation, because without any substantial move to accommodate Indian political opinion, it was difficult that the existing sympathy and desire to cause no trouble to the British Government would have continued for long.

In the existing war situation, at the time when the United Kingdom was alone facing the brunt of Hitler's aggression, the British Government was keen to have the fullest cooperation of the Dominions and India, which was one major repository of manpower. There was every apprehension of an early German invasion of the British islands. The United States attitude was still one of neutrality in the circumstances. The Secretary of State was keen to recognise the Indian opinion and make some definite



offer to win active cooperation of India in the war output. Therefore, he suggested consideration of the whole constitutional problem both in the Centre and the provinces. This would be a preliminary to the resolving of deadlock which the Secretary of State felt must be tackled immediately, and that an initiative should be adopted by the Viceroy to find a way out of the stalemate. He suggested to Lord Linlithgow that he should meet the leaders of the political parties, and appealed to them "to consider whether in the perilous situation of the war, they could not agree to discuss among themselves ways and means of reaching sufficient accommodation to enable ministries to resume office with common consent in the provinces, and to enable political leaders to join the Viceroy's Executive Council, with the general purpose of placing India in a position of active and conscious cooperation in the effort of the Allies to crush Hitlerism." The British Government was at this time keen that the provincial governments should function normally within the constitution and that the Central Government should reflect the political opinion in the country. In his view this was the only means by which the active cooperation of India might be secured and the resources of the country fully utilised in the prosecution of war against the Axis Powers.

The Viceroy's meetings with the political leaders revealed once again the wide gap and the deep ditch which divided the Congress and the Muslim League, and also pointed to the differing viewpoints of the other parties. It is unfortunate but a fact that there was no unanimity at the time in respect of the Indian political goal and the methods by which it might be attained. The Congress was emphatic about complete independence and the constitution to be framed by a Constituent Assembly freely elected to represent the various interests in the country, with the decisions of which the British Government would have nothing to do. Immediately, the Congress leaders demanded the formation of a national government free from control by the Governor-General and the Secretary of State and wholly responsible to the elected legislature. The Muslim League, on the other hand, had adopted the programme of the partition of the country and the creation of a separate Muslim state. It was not prepared to accept any constitution-making body which would frame a constitution for an undivided India. However, during the pendency of the war, the Muslim League was prepared to render co-operation to the British Government in their war effort provided the Muslims had a major share both in the provincial and central spheres. Parity with the Congress if it entered the Government, otherwise a major share of the seats in the Councils, was demanded by the League leaders at this stage. The liberals advocated co-operation with the British war effort, and hoped for a Dominion Status after the war, considering full independence for India quite impracticable. The Hindu

Mahasabha was willing to give responsive cooperation in the war effort in the hope of eventual Indian independence, for which the Viceroy's announcements were considered to provide an acceptable basis. The discussions, therefore, with the political leaders and the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes did not yield any agreed formula about the resolution of the deadlock.

The Congress Working Committee met early in July in Delhi and passed a resolution which, while unequivocally declaring full independence as the goal of India, made a constructive suggestion to the effect that "as an immediate step to giving effect to it (independence), a Provisional National Government should be constituted at the centre, which, although formed as a transitory measure, should be such as to command the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature and secure the closest co-operation of the responsible governments in the provinces. The Working Committee are of opinion that unless the aforesaid declarations are made and the national government accordingly formed at the centre without delay, all the efforts at organising the material and moral resources of the country for its defence cannot in any sense be voluntary or as from a free country and will, therefore, be ineffective. The Congress Working Committee declare that if these measures are adopted, it will enable the Congress to throw its full weight into the efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country." The sincerity of the Congress to help in the war effort and to provide for effective defence of India is evident from the fact that the Working Committee, in one of its Resolutions of 17 June, had repudiated non-violence in the sphere of defence of the country. In that resolution the Working Committee had said that while "Mahatma Gandhi desires the Congress to be true to the creed of non-violence and to declare its unwillingness that India should maintain armed forces to defend her freedom against external aggression or internal disorder, the Committee are unable to go the full length of Gandhiji. . . . and therefore absolve him from the responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress had to pursue, namely, the parallel organisation of self-defence and the maintenance of public security throughout the country by Congressmen on their own and in full co-operation with the sympathetic groups." Hence, the July Resolution of the Congress Working Committee was intended as a positive approach. This was endorsed by the All India Congress Committee at the end of July. Thus, it may be said that the moment was auspicious for settlement and India's full cooperation in the war if the British Government were prepared to part with power after the war and give an earnest indication of their desire to do so by associating the political leaders effectively with the conduct of government immediately.

However, the British Government, and more so the Viceroy, did not consider the war situation to be so grave as to compel them to concede the demand of the Indian National Congress. The British Government sought India's cooperation but was not prepared to pay the price for it. The growing division in the country and the communal rift which was fast developing as well as the support which it was getting from the Princes, made the Government complacent of exploiting the resources of the country for war without having to make a radical change in its structure. There being no immediate danger to the security of India's frontiers, the plans for the expansion of the armed forces and the industrial potential were still quite modest and were being implemented without much effort. In 1940 there was no realisation of the ultimate trend of war which might involve the utilization to the fullest extent of India's resources. Hence the statement, as it was made on 8 August 1940, commonly known as the August Offer, was moderate and its offer of concessions to the Indian political opinion halting. The announcement made by the Viceroy, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, reiterated Dominion Status as the goal for India and expressed sympathy for the Indian demand that they should frame their own constitution. It expressed the willingness of His Majesty's Government to set up after the war, with the least possible delay, "a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new constitution." Assurance was also given that in the intervening period the British Government would promote "every sincere and practical step that might be taken by representative Indians themselves to reach a basis of friendly agreement as to the form which the post-war body should take and the methods by which it should arrive at its conclusions." However, it was made quite clear that during the war no change in the constitution would be possible. Only after the war could the Act of 1935 be re-examined in all its implications and phases. At the same time the minorities were given an assurance that the Government would not "transfer its responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government the authority of which was denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life, nor could it be a party to the coercion of such elements into submission, to such a system." For the present, the offer was for expanding the Governor-General's Executive Council by the inclusion of some representative Indians and to create a body known as War Advisory Council to associate Indian public opinion with the conduct of the war. The statement appealed for co-operation and expressed the hope for "the attainment by India of that free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth which remains the proclaimed and accepted goal of the Imperial Crown and the British Parliament."

The Viceroy had sent advance copies of this offer to the political leaders and was prepared to discuss its terms with them. The Congress President did not find in the August Offer any meeting ground for the Congress and therefore refused to discuss it further with the Viceroy. There was great disappointment in the Congress circles and resentment at the Offer which did not make any effort to concede even partially the Congress demand. All that was intended was expansion of the Executive Council by associating some Indians, but to function within the framework of the Act of 1919. This was scarcely compatible with the demand for national government of the cabinet type which alone could satisfy the Congress at the time. The Muslim League also, while recording its satisfaction on the assurance given by the British Government that no future constitution would be adopted without the Muslim consent, did not accept the August Offer because it fell far short of the League demands. By the end of September it was clear that the August Offer, except for securing the acceptance of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Liberals, the Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes had failed to resolve the deadlock because of its rejection by the Congress and the Muslim League. In October the Congress had once again expressed its faith in the creed of non-violence and had requested Mahatma Gandhi to take up the leadership. The demand for civil disobedience was now being voiced and Mahatma Gandhi decided on the programme of Individual Civil Disobedience, on the issue of freedom of speech and expression of India's opposition to participation in the war effort. The Muslim League reaffirmed the Lahore Resolution for the division of the country. Thus when the Battle of Britain was nearing its end and the danger of invasion of Great Britain was over, there was no settlement of the Indian problem and the Government continued to exist in its old form without securing the willing co-operation and active association of the Indian political leaders in its task of employing the resources of India for the prosecution of the war.

## CHAPTER IV

# Plans and Operations in the Middle East and Africa, 1939-April 1941

The importance of the Middle East, comprising Egypt, East Africa, Palestine, Turkey, Iraq and Iran in British strategy had been fully recognised before the war. In the Anglo-French discussions of policy and the decisions which were taken in 1938, Italy's participation in the war on behalf of Germany was taken into account, and in that connection, "the broad strategic policy for the conduct of the war" in that region was outlined. The view then was that, while in Europe the strategy would be mainly defensive, in North Africa, Italian action might afford an "opportunity for counter-offensive operations early in the war, without prejudice to the success of the defence of Europe. Our control of Italian communications to East Africa and adequate measures to raise the tribes in Ethiopia might achieve early results in that area. In general, therefore, we should be ready to seize any opportunity of obtaining, without undue cost, successes against Italy which might reduce her will to fight."<sup>1</sup> In the British appreciations in the last few months before the declaration of war, Egypt's strategic importance was clearly emphasised. The Chiefs of Staff in their report, 'European Appreciation', in February 1939, had reiterated the well-known argument that the control of the Suez Canal depended on the British control of Egypt—and the Suez Canal was the life-line of the Empire—and that Alexandria might be converted into an operational naval base, in view of the untenability of Malta against Italian attacks. The security of the Suez Canal was vital as a safeguard of communications between Great Britain and India and the eastern Dominions. Not only the Suez Canal, but the entire region from Egypt to the Persian Gulf had emerged into unprecedented strategic importance, largely owing to the growth of aviation, for it was traversed by the air routes to India and beyond from London. Moreover, and that was no less a predominant factor, the Anglo-Iranian oilfields to the north of the Persian Gulf were the principal source of oil for the United Kingdom on which the Royal Navy mainly depended and which were largely transported through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Before the war, Iraqi oil from Kirkuk flowed through the pipelines to the Mediterranean ports of Haifa in Palestine and Tripoli in Syria. The Persian Gulf oil from Bahrein, Kuwait,

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1. Quoted in *Grand Strategy*, II, p. 10.

Oman and Saudi Arabia also found its way to Great Britain; and it was essential to keep its flow unfettered, to maintain the freedom of seas to the east of Suez and the Canal itself and in no way to allow British control there to pass to the Italians. It was further to the strategic advantage of the British that Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, and the other Arab states should be retained in friendly relations and the Axis influence eliminated from there.

The danger to this area was two-fold. Italian ambitions of recreating the Roman Empire by holding the entire coastline of Northern Africa and by possessing the area on the Aegean Sea, had revived under Mussolini, whose successful Abyssinian adventure was but a preliminary move in this direction. With Italian forces in Libya in the west and Eritrea in the east, Egypt and British and French possessions in East Africa faced the danger of being enveloped and pressed into submission to the will of the Duce. The forts of Assab and Massawa were well sited to threaten Allied shipping passing through the Red Sea. Kismayu and Mogadishu in Italian Somaliland, on the Indian Ocean, could at any moment harass British ships carrying vital military supplies from the east or via the Cape of Good Hope. The Italian danger was acute, as the Fascist regime since 1935 had been building up strength in Africa. This danger was, however, not so great, owing to the low morale of the Italians, as that from Germany breaking through the Balkan states, penetrating through Turkish defences, traversing through Syria and Palestine and invading Egypt from the north. Anglo-French strength in the eastern Mediterranean, and their continued hold over Egypt, Palestine and Syria were an insurance for the security and freedom of the Balkan states, particularly Greece and Roumania, which had been guaranteed by the United Kingdom. But a successful German or Italian aggression in the Balkans, with the loss of Cyprus and Crete to them, would spell the destruction of British sway over Egypt and Palestine and bring disaster to their entire Middle Eastern interests. The British Government and the Chiefs of Staffs fully appreciated these dangers and, conscious of the immense strategic value of the Middle East, were determined to maintain their predominant position there.

In the period between the Abyssinian expedition and her entry into the Second World War, Italy had employed propaganda and diplomatic manoeuvres to build up a growing influence in the Arab lands, as well as supplied aircraft to Afghanistan. Mussolini had posed as the friend and protector of the Muslims, and the Arab states of the Middle East, which suffered from political domination, in some form or other, of the United Kingdom and France, were inclined to lend a sympathetic ear to Italian or German appeals, to achieve their national objectives. Fascist support was extended

for democratic national independence. This situation was pregnant with danger for British imperial interests. Any weakening of their military superiority in the Mediterranean would react further on their prestige and would incline the Muslim states to join the other camp. In that circumstance, it would be easier for the Nazi forces, after occupying the Balkans, to stage rapid marches towards the east through Iraq and Iran to threaten the western defences of India. Such a development was not merely an academic possibility, for in 1941, for some months, the danger had become real. There was also apprehension that, once Germany had gained passage, by persuasion or force, through Turkey, or had entered northern Iraq through Syria and Palestine, the Nazi armies would be able to strike in the rear of Russia and would stab her in her most vulnerable part, the Caucasus oil-bearing region. Therefore, to limit the extent of German aggression, to afford protection to Russia in her exposed southern frontier and to save India from a German invasion, in collaboration with a Japanese thrust or without it, Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean areas must be secured against Italian conquest. It was this strategic necessity which had prompted Lord Chatfield's Committee to impress the urgency of India undertaking responsibility for the joint defence of Egypt, Persian Gulf region, Iraq, Aden and East Africa. These areas were defined as the zones of India's external defence, in whose integrity lay inherent the security of India's western frontiers and her extensive coastline. One of the major commitments which the Government of India had to accept, before the war, was to supply troops for the reinforcement of Egypt, Palestine, Anglo-Iranian oilfields on the Persian Gulf, Aden and Sudan. A division was earmarked for despatch to these areas, and nearly two-thirds of it had left the shores of India before September 1939.

The British Chiefs of Staffs and the Anglo-French Supreme Command had based their strategy on the assumption of Italy's hostility and "dealing decisively" with her and defeating her prior to adopting the offensive against Germany. Italy provided the launching area for air attacks on southern Germany and Austria, as also a base for land operations directed against the German undefended south. It may be observed here that Egypt and African coast provided the only ground for assault on Italy which in turn would open a second front against Germany. But this early strategy seemed to be knocked out before its initiation because of the unwillingness of Mussolini to join the war at its outset. In July 1939, the British Chiefs of Staff discussed this new possibility and the effect of Italian neutrality on their strategy. Their view was "that although a neutral Italy would to some extent hamper the application of economic pressure on Germany", and would

involve "the abandonment of the only counter-offensive measures on the part of the Allies", "Italian neutrality would appreciably reduce our military commitments and military risks; in particular the Mediterranean would remain open as a line of communication. . . . The upshot was that the longer Italy remained neutral, even if her neutrality showed benevolence towards Germany, the better it would be for the Allies, and only if her neutrality were strained to an extreme point would it be to their interest to antagonise her."<sup>2</sup> Under this strategic conviction, the British Government tried to respect Italian neutrality and did nothing to undermine it, even though it meant delay in the military preparedness of the Middle East and denying opportunities for intelligence or preparing a belt of hostile territory in Africa against the Fascist state.

Before the war commenced, and in its early stages, the Allied position in the Middle East was not an uneasy one. Politically Turkey was friendly and Egypt had not strayed from the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. However, nationalist elements there were not happy at its military clauses and had organised demonstrations against the continuance of British forces within the Egyptian territory. But the Government was prepared to abide by its commitments and had undertaken measures to enhance the defensiveness of the country. Outside of Egypt, the Arabian states were not unfriendly. The Palestine problem had roused Arab apprehensions and led to large-scale Arab strikes, but the appeals of the rulers of Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Trans-Jordan and Yemen led to its being called off. In 1938, however, violence increased again and the country was almost in a state of open rebellion. The British Government adopted military measures to suppress it, but the process was necessarily long and arduous. Palestine had a strong British force and plans for its reinforcements were also there. Early in 1939 a conference was called in London to reach a settlement to which the Arab states were also invited. A temporary easing off of the situation resulted from it. It was essential to win over the goodwill of the surrounding Arab states, such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Trans-Jordan, which had great strategic value for the British as they commanded the pipelines and the overland route from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean—an alternative route for communication with India and the east, in case of the Red Sea route being liable to interference by the Italian navy and air force. The Iraqi government was prepared to fulfil the terms of the agreement of 1932 and had accented the establishment of an air contingent at Habbaniya. The Yemen was also friendly, hence there was no danger to Aden. The French mandatory Syria and her colonies were organised for joint action



and the French Fleet and her colonial armies were a deterrent to Italian aggression. Thus, the British could then hope to isolate Italy politically in the case of her hostility. But by the middle of 1940, the situation had radically altered to the prejudice of the United Kingdom.

Successive German victories in Europe had created strong doubts about the capability of the Allies to win the war. These were reinforced by the Axis propaganda, particularly the one carried on by Italy through her Arabian broadcasts. Playfair has described the feelings thus : "In Persia the general feeling was that Germany was the stronger, and there was much dissatisfaction in government circles at the failure of Great Britain to fulfil her orders for armaments as promptly as had been hoped. In Iraq public opinion was noticeably turning against the British, and . . . there was danger of the establishment by coup d'etat of a government hostile to the Allies' interests. The Mufti (of Jerusalem) had fled to Iraq from the Lebanon and had begun to be politically active. In Saudi Arabia there was strong sympathy with the Arab cause in Palestine and Syria, although Ibn Saud himself remained friendly. In Trans-Jordan the Emir's confidence in Great Britain had never wavered. In short, while there were those who realised that an Allied victory offered the best guarantee of such independence as the Middle Eastern countries had already achieved, there was also a body of more envenomed opinion which regarded Allied influence as the main hindrance to the achievement of full independence. The under-current of discontent created conditions favourable to propaganda, intrigue and misrepresentation."<sup>3</sup> "The Egyptians viewed the possibility of becoming involved in war with apprehension which might very easily be turned into panic. Under the pressure of Axis propaganda, backed by German successes, this would in all probability take an anti-British direction."<sup>4</sup> Nationalist opinion throughout the Arab countries, including Egypt, was growing sceptical of, and hostile to, the British and tending closer to the Axis, which exploded the early complacency and created a dangerous situation at the time of the fall of France and declaration of war by Italy. The French defection intensified British embarrassment and called for greater military preparation, not only to resist Italian attacks, but also to maintain the Middle East as a safe line of communication and a secure bastion against possible German offensive action.

Militarily also the situation was not one of confidence. At the outbreak of war, in September 1939, the Middle East Command had the following forces under it distributed over the entire region :—

3. Playfair, *The Mediterranean & Middle East I*, pp. 88-89.

4. *Ibid*

In Egypt : the 7th Armoured Division which was not complete; the 4th Indian Division having only one infantry brigade and a regiment of artillery; a Royal Artillery Group comprising four regiments; and eight British infantry battalions.

In Palestine : the 8th Division with two brigades only; two British cavalry regiments; and four British infantry battalions.

In the Sudan : three British infantry battalions and the Sudan Defence Force comprising 20 companies in all, mostly for internal security.

In British Somaliland : the headquarters and three companies of Camel Corps.

These forces were not complete formations. The total was only 21 battalions of infantry, 64 field guns and 48 anti-tank and 8 anti-aircraft guns. In addition to these the French had in Tunisia six divisions, a fortress division and a light cavalry division, which was sufficient for local operations only. In Syria they had an expeditionary force comprising three divisions, which were "inadequately armed and trained", and 40,000 troops organised for frontier protection and tribal control. This Allied force was barely adequate to maintain the security of the Middle East against German and Italian aggression. But in June 1940, when Italy entered the war as a belligerent, the French defection had left only the British, without counting on the French colonial forces, to withstand the Axis invasion. There was no appreciable increase in the strength of the British armed forces, though the Dominions and India had sent some troops. From India, the 5th Indian Brigade had arrived in addition to the 11th Indian Brigade, which was already a part of the 4th Indian Division. The total strength of the British forces in June 1940 was a little over 85,000 men, distributed over Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, British Somaliland, Palestine, Aden and Cyprus, divided by long distances from each other. Of this Egypt had about 36,000 men, and the additions over 1939 were one infantry brigade with the 4th Indian Division, part of one New Zealand division and six additional British infantry battalions. In Palestine, the total came up to 27,500 men with the addition of the 1st Cavalry Division and the 6th Australian Division which was not complete having only two brigades. Kenya had 8500 men formed under two East African brigades, Aden had two Indian battalions and there was one British battalion in Cyprus. The Dominion troops were not fully equipped and were not complete formations. In addition to the land forces, the Royal Air Force had merely 205 aircraft, in Egypt and Palestine, but the

position was far from reassuring as the force did not have either modern fighters or long-range bombers. There were, besides, in Aden two bomber squadrons, one fighter and one flight of general reconnaissance squadrons; in the Sudan three bomber and one fighter squadrons besides the possible South African squadron in Kenya. The total in East Africa did not exceed 200 aircraft. The position of the Royal Navy was also not very much better. At Gibraltar there was one battleship, one 6 inch cruiser and nine destroyers; while in the East Mediterranean the British Fleet consisted of four battleships, eight 6 inch cruisers, twenty destroyers and one aircraft carrier. In the Red Sea all that existed was a force of escort vessels for convoys.

The Italian force, in contrast, was truly imposing. In Libya there was a force of 215,000, under Marshal Italo Balbo, made up of nine Metropolitan, four Blackshirt and two native Libyan divisions with army and corps troops besides many native units and frontier guards. These were organised into the Fifth and the Tenth Armies. On the other side, in Italian East Africa also, there were no less than 200,000 men under the Duke of Aosta. Twenty thousand of these with two hundred guns, comprising eleven brigades of native troops and twelve Blackshirt battalions, were massed against the Sudan frontier, while there were 8000 troops in South Ethiopia; 7000 troops and 4000 levies in Italian Somaliland and a Metropolitan division in Addis Ababa and six native brigades in Dire-dawa and Harar. There were besides 400 guns, 200 light tanks and 20,000 lorries. No doubt there were certain deficiencies. Transport was inadequate to enable full mobility. "The heavier weapons, for example tanks and artillery, were in general below modern standards of efficiency, while there was a shortage of medium artillery, and a diversity of types in other natures."<sup>5</sup> But the greatest weakness was in the lack of training of a large part and the low morale of the entire force, caused by poor food and living conditions as well as the absence of political enthusiasm, the sense of a mission, except among the Blackshirts. The Italian air force was also bigger than that of the British. In Libya they had "140 bombers, 101 fighters and 72 other types—a total of 313 aircraft", while in East Africa they had 325 aircraft.<sup>6</sup> This strength could easily be reinforced from the Italian mainland in Libya, and the bombers could be flown even to Eritrea via Libya; though there might be difficulty in replenishing the spare parts in East Africa. On the sea also, when the French Fleet was eliminated, Italian superiority was fairly marked. They had "six battleships, seven 8 inch, and twelve 6 inch cruisers and some fifty fleet destroyers" and 108 submarines in the Medi-

5. Playfair I, p. 92.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 95-96.

terranean. In the Red Sea, there were eight Italian submarines and seven destroyers besides craft for local defence, all based on Massawa. The Italians had no aircraft carrier but they could use the shore-based aircraft for all air support to the navy. They could use their central position in the Mediterranean "to concentrate superior force in the area of their choice." Also "type for type the speed of Italian warships was higher than that of the British, and this could give the Italian Fleet an advantage in determining when and where to seek action, when to break it off, or when to avoid it altogether."<sup>7</sup>

Taken as a whole, in the Middle Eastern theatre, particularly in the Mediterranean area, Italy was placed in a superior position and well adapted to take an offensive against the British who had been weakened by the defection of France and the pressure of German blitzkrieg and threat of invasion on their homeland. The Italians were well placed to divide the British forces in the Middle East and snap their lines of communication both through the Mediterranean as well as the Red Sea, which were the life-lines of the British Empire. But whereas the British troops were fighting for a cause, and were faced with the grim struggle for survival, the Italians had no heart in the fight and Mussolini had joined the war only in the hope of early German victories so that he might have a strong claim for booty at the peace conference. This opportunism together with a dictatorial government did not create the spark of patriotism and loyal devotion which produce a frenzy to sacrifice everything for an ethical cause. The absence of moral urge was the greatest weakness of Italy in her fight against the British. There was also economic weakness in so far as she depended for the supply of raw materials, coal and oil, on England and the east European states, and these could be stopped by the hostility of British navy. She was not prepared for anything more than a short war, which was all that Mussolini desired.

Mussolini declared war on 10 June 1940, before France had accepted the armistice, and began his fight against the United Kingdom by an air attack on Malta and the sinking of a British cruiser *Calypso*. But this was not followed by any quick offensive action in Africa. Mussolini had not planned his strategy and had never defined it accurately. In March 1940, when, though the war in Europe was progressing in favour of Hitler, France and Britain were still intact, he had entertained no ambitious designs except that of adopting the offensive in East Africa against French Somaliland and the Sudan, while he would keep on the defensive against Tunisia and Egypt, or the Aegean Sea or Kenya. Only

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7. *Ibid*, p. 91.

the navy could assume offensive in the Mediterranean. In May, even when France was almost tottering to a fall, Mussolini did not exhibit his aggressive intentions. On May 29, he told his Chiefs of Staff, "On the land front we cannot undertake anything spectacular, we shall remain on the defensive. . . . Our forces will concentrate on England—viz. on her positions and her naval forces in port and in the Mediterranean."<sup>8</sup> Naval action was the only action contemplated before the fall of France; but after that he decided to move against Egypt and launch his offensive in the east, because he was free from the danger of French attack in the rear. But no date was fixed for the Egyptian invasion, and all that was done in the early days was to occupy French Somaliland and move against Kassala and Gallabat in the Sudan and occupy it. Moyale in Kenya was also snatched by the Italian forces. Moreover, there was immediate air action on the Egyptian frontier, but Cairo was not raided and the British forces were left in peace for another six weeks. This fitful start of Italian offensive had ended with nominal successes and weak demonstrations of air and naval strength, and the much feared Egyptian invasion or offensive in the Sudan had been simply put off for a better date.

This Italian inactivity, however, gave a most welcome respite to the British who were enabled to organise their forces and bring to the Middle East some most needed reinforcements. For the British, as was stressed by the Chiefs of Staff at the beginning of July 1940, the retention of complete control in the Middle East was "of the utmost military importance in view of the economic blockade of Europe and of our requirements for oil". The maintenance of the lines of communication with the east, the security of oil supplies, and the vital importance of political defence of the Near East against German aggression, all these were served by retaining hold over Egypt and Palestine and keeping the Suez Canal, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf open as British channels of traffic. To strengthen the morale of their Balkan allies and to bolster up Turkish benevolence and prevent the Turks from succumbing to Nazi threats or persuasions, it was essential to keep the British Fleet in the eastern Mediterranean, which was done by Mr. Churchill, even against the insistence of the Admiralty which was anxious about its safety and wished to withdraw the Fleet to Gibraltar. The safety of the Suez Canal had to be provided for, and that passage was to be prevented from falling into the hands of Italians and Germans. Also the Red Sea must not be allowed to be interfered with by the Italian submarines or aircraft operating from their East African bases. All this was possible only if Egypt, and particularly the Delta area, was protected from Italian offensive action and was retained as the major military base

for operations against Italy, both in the Northern and Eastern Africa. This involved strengthening of the forces, both land and air, there. The Chiefs of Staff outlined the strategy thus, "The security of the Middle East depended on the defence of Egypt and the Sudan, Iraq, Palestine, Aden and Kenya. Kenya was our second line of defence in Africa; it was a base of operations against Italian East Africa and offered, through Mombasa, an alternative line of communication to Egypt. Our strategy must for the present be in the main defensive, though local offensives should be started whenever possible."<sup>9</sup> The existing forces in the area might be adequate to deal with an Italian attack on Egypt, but if the Germans joined it with their forces, particularly the air force, then the position would be quite dangerous and Alexandria might be absolutely unsafe. It was clearly realised that the loss of Egypt would be fatal for British interests, as that might lead to the whole of North Africa passing under German or Italian control, Spain joining the Axis, Turkey weaned away from benevolent neutrality and Britain being placed in a desperate situation. The prospect of survival for the British depended on the security of Egypt, and it was this realisation which prompted Churchill's government to accept to send troops, tanks and air force to Egypt at a time when Britain was itself facing the prospect of a dangerous invasion. One armoured division, 150 'I' tanks and a few air squadrons were to be sent to Egypt as soon as possible, and the 4th Indian Division from India was to be diverted to the Middle East. In the period of Italian inactivity, Egypt was strengthened and East African forces were also reinforced by the despatch of the 5th Indian Division there.

The Italians began the war with an air attack on Malta on 11 June 1940, and repeated the performance for some time causing damage to British installations there. They raided British railhead in western Egypt at Mersa Matruh, and later dropped bombs on Alexandria and Cairo as well. But the initiative was largely in British hands. Their aircraft attacked Italian airfields in Cyrenaica and harassed their positions in East Africa. In July naval actions were also fought to the discomfiture of the Italian naval fleet which generally avoided contesting naval supremacy of the Mediterranean with the Royal Navy. It was on land, however, that General Wavell's army, very much inferior in numbers and inadequately equipped and short of armour, adopted the tactics of harassing the Italian army then holding a position to the south of Bardia on the Egyptian border. The rapid movements and sudden punching attacks on Italian outposts and ammunition dumps by small mobile units created panic in the Italian camp, where grew the impression of British strength and the weight of attack was greatly exaggerated.

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9. *Grand Strategy*, Vol II, p. 306.

ed. Alan Morehead writes that the Italians felt that "a large-scale British attack was imminent. Balboa drew in his horns, cut down his own patrols and called for more reinforcements from Rome."<sup>10</sup> British patrols on the frontier demoralised the Italians and then returned to Matruh. On 28 June, there was an air raid on Tobruk in which Marshal Balboa was killed; and Marshal Graziani assumed command of the Libyan army on 13 August. On the Egyptian front, the Italians had stopped short of assuming an invasion which Mussolini was so keen about and which he wanted to synchronise with the German invasion of England. For the moment, however, there was no major activity in the Western Desert, and rapid reinforcement of the Middle East Command commenced which, by the end of the year, had increased its defensive strength.

Meanwhile in East Africa, the Duke of Aosta, after the initial inactivity owing to the orders of Mussolini to remain on the defensive only, undertook border actions and, early in July, Kassala and Gallabat in the Sudan had been occupied by Italian forces. So also was Moyale on the Kenya border wrested from the British. In August, the untenable British Somaliland was evacuated and the Italians occupied Berbera. With these early successes, Italian activity in East Africa also had come to a halt. Their position in that region was rather a difficult one, for it could easily be cut off from the main Italian source of supply and reinforcement by British naval and air activity. As long as Egypt was held by the British forces, there was no possibility of receiving any support and supplies overland from Libya. In addition to this geographical limitation, the Ethiopian liability was draining their resources. The Patriots were ready for rebellion and could always be helped by the British to cause serious damage to the Italian position. However, initially the Italians had an advantage over their rivals because of their relative military superiority. But this was neutralised by the orders of the Duce for a strictly defensive role for Aosta and the later reinforcements of British troops in the theatre. With the retreat from Berbera and relinquishing of the weak British Somaliland, British strategy, for which General Platt was responsible, was to maintain complete hold over the Sudan, by defending Khartoum, Atbara and Gebeit, and building up reserves in Kenya. Sudan was the keystone of British strategy, and Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast had to be maintained as the port for keeping the supply line from India open.

The next activity was seen in the north where under pressure from Mussolini, Marshal Graziani began his invasion of Egypt. He moved across the frontiers and within a few days had occupied Sidi

10. Alan Morehead : *African Trilogy*, p. 23.

Barrani, a small fishing village on the coast with an airfield. Thus the Italian Tenth Army had commenced the invasion of Egypt and by 17 September had compelled the British 7th Armoured Division and other forces on the frontier to withdraw to the rear. This move had synchronised with the German blitz on Britain. The general strategic picture of the war was also favourable for the success of the Italians, but Marshal Graziani, contrary to the expectations of the attacked, made a halt at Sidi Barrani and refused to move further. The British withdrawal from the frontiers was only a move to draw the Italian forces deep into the Egyptian territory and there destroy the invading forces. The British forces were to hold on to Mersa Matruh area in the neighbourhood of which the 4th Indian Division, which had been sent to the Western Desert, had taken its positions at Naghamish.

As has been mentioned earlier, on India had been imposed the obligation of the defence of Egypt as a point of her external defence. In the Defence Plans of 1939 the Army Headquarters in India had undertaken to fulfil two schemes known as Heron-One and Heron-Two for action in Egypt. In August 1939, the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade and the 4th Field Regiment moved into Egypt. Next month, in September, the other part of the scheme also was despatched to Egypt comprising the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade and ancillary troops. These arrived in October 1939, and it was the combination of these two detachments which formed the famous 4th Indian Division which had only two brigades in the beginning. It grew into full-fledged division when it received more regiments and units and started its training in desert warfare. The 4th Indian Division, after the declaration of war by Italy, was moved to the Western Desert to hold a forward position, and it was about the middle of August 1940 that the Division together with its cavalry regiment, the Central India Horse, reached its destination Naghamish and concentrated there. It had withdrawn to Baqush when the Italian invasion moved forward, but some troops were maintained at Naghamish so that the work on the defences might not be interrupted.

While the Italian invasion had stopped at Sidi Barrani and no further moves were being undertaken, the British as well as the Axis Powers were busy examining their future strategy. At the end of August the British and the United States officers had entered on a discussion on the existing strategic situation and the policy which the British Government would adopt for the future conduct of war. The picture which was presented by the British officers was drawn on the basis that in spite of the grave potential threat from Japan in the Far East and Italy and Germany in the Middle East, it would be possible to assume an offensive role by the spring



of 1942. The elimination of Italy was regarded as "a strategic aim of the first importance; her collapse would reduce the threat to the Middle East, render the blockade of Germany more effective and free our hands to meet the menace of Japan."<sup>11</sup> In these strategic appreciations the extension of war into the Balkans was assumed as an early possibility. The Axis Powers, Germany and Italy, it was felt, would extend their operations into Roumania and Greece, respectively. The British policy was to draw Turkey into the war and this object was to be served, they felt, when the security of the Balkans had been endangered by Axis invasion. The guarantee already given to Greece and Roumania would necessarily lead to British intervention in the former to save it from destruction by the Axis Powers.

Actually Hitler had made a move towards the Balkans by sending a military mission to Roumania. This mission was really to protect the oilfields and "to enable the Roumanian armed forces to carry out certain tasks according to a definite plan drawn up in the interests of Germany", and also to prepare the German and Roumanian forces to take to war against Soviet Russia eventually. By the end of September, thus, a token German force had moved into Roumania which had set into motion a chain of events which brought the Balkans within the zone of war and ultimately led to the German invasion of Russia which Hitler had started planning about this time. This event had its repercussions on Italian policy as well. Mussolini had invaded Albania earlier and was keen to split up Yugoslavia to his advantage and extend his aggressive designs against Greece as well. But as late as July 1940, he had been deterred from taking any action in the Balkans by Hitler who had impressed on Ciano "the importance of not stirring up trouble in the Balkans and provoking Russian intervention." But he had also hinted that in case trouble broke out without any effort on their part in the Balkans, Germany would welcome any strong Italian action. Hitler had also compelled Mussolini not to take any immediate action against either Yugoslavia or Greece. Under this pressure Mussolini, against his will, had postponed action in the Balkans and had concentrated his efforts in North Africa in which he had been assured of every help from Germany. But when Hitler moved in the Balkans by sending troops to Roumania, Mussolini was no longer to be held back from his ambition of conquering Greece and, even against the advice of his military advisers, an ultimatum was presented to the Government of Greece on 28 October, and the Italian invasion of that country began. Mussolini had also desired Graziani to press his offensive against Egypt so that British aid might not be available to Greece. But

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11. *Grand Strategy*, p. 342.

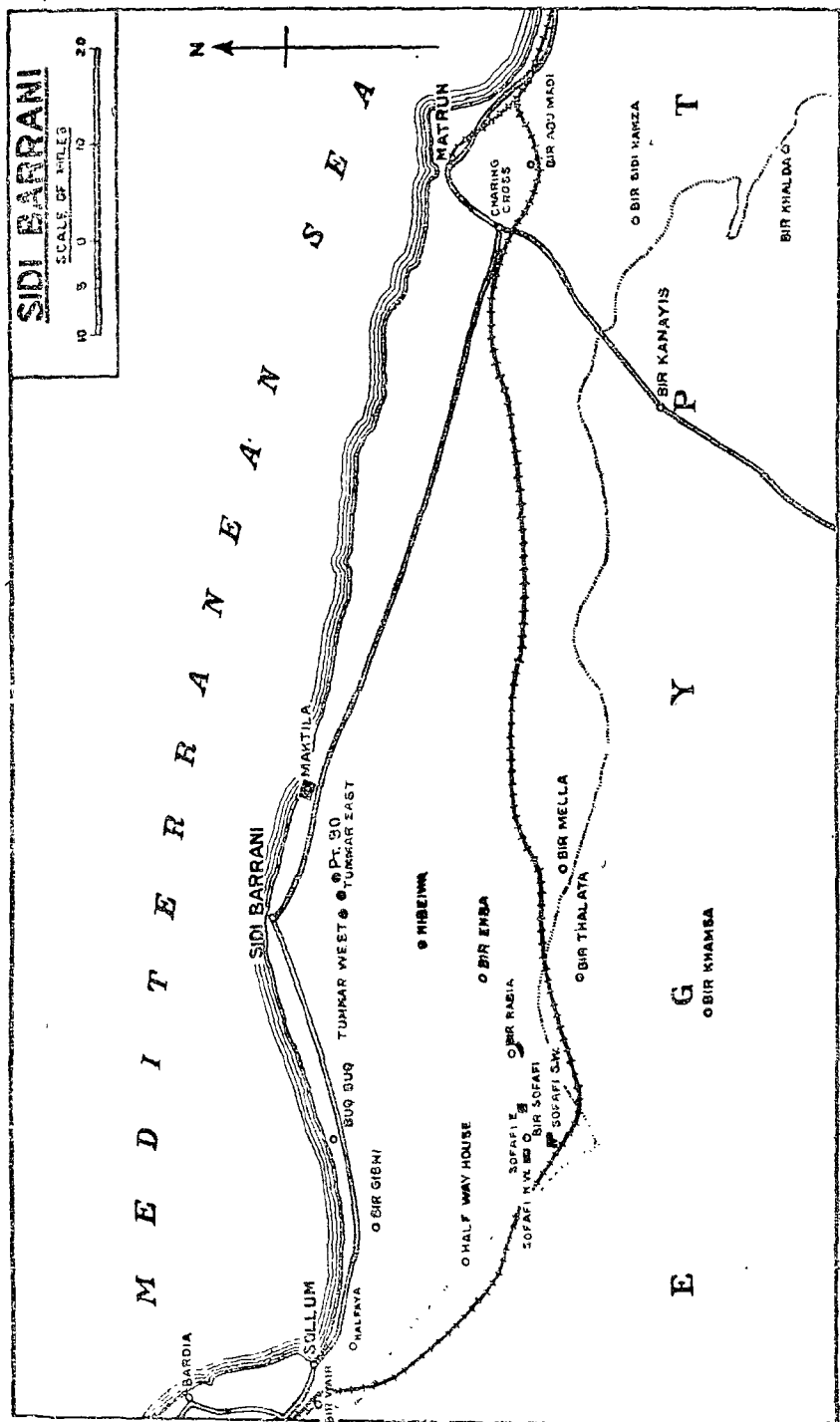
the Italian commander chose to keep to Sidi Barrani and reported to his Chief that he would need another two months to launch an attack on Egypt.

The Middle East Command and the War Office in London could not be complacent about the situation in the Western Desert. Though there was no immediate indication of the resumption of Italian offensive, it was bound to come before long and the danger was that the Italian forces might be strengthened by the arrival of German land or air forces. In fact Hitler had been thinking of despatching his armoured forces to Libya, but Mussolini had not asked for it at that stage. The British Prime Minister and the War Office were agreed that the forces in the Middle East must be consistently strengthened. They had decided to send a reinforcement of two cruisers and two light tank regiments in spite of the danger to the British Isles and the weakness in armoured forces there. There was also agreement about strengthening the air force in Egypt. Mr. Eden, the Secretary of State for War, who was at the moment in the Middle East, had been pressing for the despatch of more air force, for he felt that with adequate air reinforcements, it would be possible for the Middle East Command not only to defeat the Italians but even to launch an offensive against them in January 1941. Thus, at a time when the Middle East Command was in urgent need of reinforcements to meet the danger on the western front, the appeal for help came from the Greek Government, and the British Government decided, as a matter of honour, to render whatever aid they could to Greece to fight the Italians. However, the Italians failed to make any effective impression on Greece, and their offensive had come to a halt early in November. They had even been forced back into Albania by the middle of the next month. On the Egyptian front also the Italians had made no further move. Meanwhile the situation had become quite favourable for the British. The defence of Gibraltar had been strengthened. Malta had more troops. In Sudan there were ample forces to resist further Italian advance. The Emperor Haile Selassie of Abyssinia had arrived in Khartoum, and the chances of rebellion in Abyssinia had considerably improved. In the Western Desert the position was much better and Italian attack could be held back by the land forces. There was, however, weakness in the air which the Chiefs of Staff in England were trying to remedy. It was in this situation that General Wavell, the Supreme Commander of the Middle East, summed up his strategy as "first to defeat the Italian forces threatening Egypt; secondly, to liquidate the Italian forces in East Africa and so remove the threat to the Red Sea; thirdly, to build up forces to help Greece, Turkey and other countries in the Middle East." He had also decided on taking up the offensive on the western front before the Italians received

any German support which it was unlikely would be held back indefinitely.

General Wavell had no intention of leaving the Italians free to take further initiative and, almost at the same time as their invasion of the Egyptian frontier, had asked for the preparation of plans for advancing into Cyrenaica. With the capture of Sidi Barrani he had issued orders that if the Italians moved further east to capture Matruh a heavy blow should be dealt to them with the object of completely destroying their force. It was with this aim that a large part of the Western Desert Force had been disposed in the Matruh area. For more than a month, however, there was no activity by him in this direction. Meanwhile Mr. Churchill was getting restive and was keen that offensive action should be taken against the Italians. But the diversion of forces had weakened Wavell's prospects of an early and a quick action in the Western Desert. However, when Mr. Eden was there, about the end of October, General Wavell exposed to him his plan of offensive action. His idea was of a short four or five day counter-attack on the Italian fortified camps which stretched from Maktila on the Mediterranean coast to Sofafi, a place 50 miles to the south-west. The Italians had established fortified camps at a number of places, viz. Maktila, Sidi Barrani, Tummar East and West, Point 90 and Nibeiwa in the north and Sofafi and Rabia in the south. There was, however, a gap of about 25 miles between the southern and northern group of fortified camps. The idea of General Wavell was to make a short, swift attack on these camps simultaneously in the Sidi Barrani and Sofafi areas and then the troops might withdraw to the railhead at Matruh. The 7th Armoured Division, the 4th Indian Division, the 7th Royal Tank Regiment and a few other Corps troops were to take part in this expedition. The matter was kept an absolute secret for some time, and it was only about the end of November that the operation Compass was disclosed to the senior commanders of the force. Early December was fixed as the time for launching his invasion. The British Prime Minister promised to hasten to the utmost the arrival of air reinforcements which Wavell had so much asked for and assured him of his full support.

The 4th Indian Division was assigned the main role in this invasion. It was to be supported by the 7th Armoured Division which was to protect its flank and the Selby Force, a group formed of some British troops, was to support the attack by making a thrust into Maktila and Sidi Barrani along the coastline. The Royal Air Force was to assist the land forces by pounding the hostile air ports, supply dumps and ports as well as by affording protection to the army in its move westwards. The 4th Indian



Division which had been established in the Baqqush-Naghamish area, was being trained for defensive action, but on 25 and 26 November, an exercise was held which was a rehearsal for the attack as the actual conditions of the Italian fortified camp were repeated. The troops were, however, not told of their impending role, as absolute secrecy was being maintained so that the element of surprise might not be affected. The troops were told that there would be a second exercise, but actually this second exercise was to be the real attack. The role of the 4th Indian Division and the Royal Tank Regiment which was placed under its command was to capture the camps of Nibeiwa, Tummar West, Tummar East and Pt. 90 in that order. The general plan was directed towards closing the avenues of escape to the Italian force, as the attack was to be made from the western side, and then to attack it within the enclosed areas. The expectation was that the Italian troops would try to retreat. The retreat would be possible only if they maintained their communications with Buq-Buq. The plan therefore was to cut that line by naval and air bombardments, and subsequently by an attack on Buq-Buq by the 4th Indian Division in the last stage of its offensive. The main attack was to be in the centre of the camps and care was taken that the Italians from the north and the south could not rush to the aid of the affected area because they were prevented from rushing to the centre by the presence of the 7th Armoured Division and the Selby Force. This plan though intended to be only an action lasting five days was, however, likely to be converted into a general pursuit of the Italian forces right up to the Egyptian frontier so as to clear the Western Desert of the Italian incubus. In his instructions of 28 November to General Wilson, General Wavell had expressed "his belief that an opportunity might occur for converting the enemy's defeat into an outstanding victory." Events in Albania had shown that Italian morale after reverse was unlikely to be high. Every possible preparation was therefore to be made to take advantage of preliminary successes and to support a possible pursuit right up to the Egyptian frontier. "I do not entertain extravagant hopes of this operation," he wrote "but I do wish to make certain that if a big opportunity occurs we are prepared morally, mentally and administratively to use it to the fullest." He was so full of confidence about the success of this plan that on 2 December, he had told the commanding officers in Sudan and Kenya that he would be able to send the 4th Indian Division to Sudan after it had completed its task in the Western Desert. He had asked them to embark on offensive operations in East Africa as well.

The operation was as planned a swift and crushing attack. The concentration began on 6 December with the move of the 4th Indian Division. The Division made a long march on the 8th to

reach the rendezvous 15 miles from Nibeiwa. The advance had been made without attracting Italian attention and at dusk on the 9th, the actual attack had begun. The success was prompt and considerable. It is not intended here to give a detailed account of this operation which has been discussed in another volume. By the 11th, the Italians had withdrawn from the whole area and were in retreat westwards. They were being pursued by the British and Indian forces. The navy had meanwhile bombarded Sollum which was to be their next halt. In the next few days the Italians had withdrawn from Sollum-Capuzzo and other positions to Bardia which had become their most forward position in the coastal sector, besides holding Siwa and Jarabub farther inland. With this victory in the battle of Sidi Barrani, Egypt had been freed from Italian invasion, and the Western Desert Force was well poised to take to an offensive operation to clear the whole of Libya of the Italians. At this moment General Wavell decided to transfer the 4th Indian Division to East Africa so that the campaign to liquidate the Italian empire there might begin. This Indian Division had its first baptism of fire in the Western Desert and gained considerable experience. As Playfair has written : "To 4th Indian Division the operation had several novel features, yet the confidence and enthusiasm of the troops when they learnt what they had to do could not have been greater. The execution of the plan bore witness to sound training and good leadership and to a fine fighting spirit in the troops." In three days a large part of the Italian force had been destroyed. The Western Desert Force had captured 38,300 prisoners, 237 guns and 73 light and medium tanks. Besides this more than a thousand vehicles had also been captured. All this had been possible by the audacity and dash of the Western Desert Force which had made full use of the element of surprise and utilised strategic deception which was successful. But more than the qualities of the British and Indian forces, it was the lack of qualities of Italian generalship, absence of judgment and the lack of will of the soldiers to fight which was responsible for this easy success of the Western Desert Force and the repulse with considerable loss of the Italians from the Egyptian border.

This early success had emboldened the Middle East Command as well as the British Government to continue the offensive. Mr. Churchill directed General Wavell thus : "I feel convinced that it is only after you have made sure that you get no farther that you relinquish the main hope in favour of secondary action in the Sudan or Dodecanese. But neither of this ought to detract from the supreme task of inflicting further defeats upon the main Italian army." The task for the subsequent months was thus laid down that the pursuit of Italian army must be continued over

Libya so as to capture the strategic and important position of Benghazi. The immediate objective was Bardia which fell on 5 January 1941. The advance was continued further west so as to occupy Tobruk, a very important harbour and a strategic position on the Mediterranean coast. This town was captured on 22 January. Thenceforth the advance was very rapid so that within the next fortnight not only Barce, Benghazi and Msus had fallen, but also Antelat and Beda Fomm had been occupied and the British force had reached El Agheila, the westernmost point in Libya. But this was the farthest point reached and there the advance stopped not only because the line of communications had been extended and difficulties of supplies were likely to begin, but mainly because of two factors : (i) the presence of the German armoured forces, and (ii) the thinning of the Middle East Force by the despatch of nearly four divisions to Greece whose government had asked for armed assistance at this stage. The Western Desert Force had therefore to stop on the border of Tripolitania. Meanwhile, a new strategy characteristic of the desert warfare was adopted by the formation of the Long Range Desert Group which succeeded in turning the flank of the Italian army and occupying Kufra oasis and Faya in the south and making contact with the Free French. The Italian losses were considerable, no less than 130,000 prisoners being captured by the British. In addition, 400 tanks and 1240 guns had also been taken possession of by the victors. At a time when Italy was involved in an ambitious venture in Greece, this disastrous blow to her army in North Africa was of immense consequence in determining the trend of war and the fate of Italy.

The trend of events in Africa was not satisfactory from the point of view of Hitler. As early as July he had thought of sending an armoured formation to North Africa to support the Italians, but Mussolini had declined to accept any help till he had captured Matruh. This stage had never been attained, and in December the Italians had been thrown back from the Egyptian frontier. Hitler however assured Italians that apart from air support, an armoured formation would be kept ready to be transported to Africa. Meanwhile the military attache in Rome had conveyed to him the gravity of the situation in Libya. From his report it was clear that the prospect of assuming offensive against Egypt was out of the question for a fairly long time, but the immediate and essential problem was that of preventing the Italians from being expelled altogether from North Africa. Accordingly, Hitler issued a directive on 11 January to the effect that "for strategic, political and psychological reasons, the Mediterranean situation where Britain is employing superior forces against our ally, requires German assistance." He desired that help should be given to Italy

both in Albania and Tripolitania. His idea of lending help to Mussolini in Africa was to send the 5th Light Motorised Division so as to be able to block further British advance. In the middle of February, however, his appreciation was that this division alone would not be effective, and therefore he ordered the transport of a complete Panzer Division which was to be commanded by General Rommel. This force had reached Tripolitania in February, and along with the active air action in the Mediterranean area, it stopped the further move of the Western Desert Force. At the same time Hitler had been compelled to intervene in Greece to prevent another serious disaster for the Italian armed forces. In December, Hitler had issued instructions for operation MARITA which was necessary from his point of view to prevent the British from establishing air bases capable of threatening both Italy and the Roumanian oilfields. In this move is contained the first expression of Hitler's designs against the Balkans as a preliminary to the invasion of Russia. With his military mission in Roumania and the alliance of Bulgaria, the stage was set for action against Yugoslavia and Greece which alone were there to resist his advance. The resistance of Yugoslavia was very short-lived and, though later as a result of a coup d'état partisan action continued in that country, the organised opposition to Nazi occupation had been liquidated. Late in winter the German forces were soon on the Greek frontier which they pierced with the result that the British Expeditionary Force which had arrived there was compelled, not after long, to retrace its steps and evacuate the country leaving Greece at the mercy of the Nazi forces. By April, the Greek diversion which had prevented further advance by German paratroops had petered out, Cyprus was in danger, the position in the eastern Mediterranean was not very secure for the British, and in Libya also the prospect of a German counter-offensive against Egypt was in evidence.

We will now direct our attention to the other theatre in Africa, viz. the Abyssinian front. As has been mentioned earlier, the 5th Indian Division had been diverted to the Sudan where it had arrived in September 1940. In the middle of December, the 4th Indian Division was also diverted to the Sudan where this force also arrived at the end of the month. General Wavell had always desired to assume an offensive role in East Africa where, owing to the isolation of the Italian forces, it was easy for him to end the Italian eastern empire and thereby to liquidate danger of a stab in his back when his forces were directed against the Italian main army in Libya. Another important object of the East African Campaign was to remove any threat to the British shipping in the Red Sea which had by now come to be the main line of supply for the Middle East Command. It has been earlier mentioned that



Italy had a strong force in Eastern Africa and that soon after the war was declared the Duke of Aosta had occupied Kassala, Gallabat and Kurmuk, three important strategic points on the eastern frontier of the Sudan which provided entry into Abyssinia and might have acted as bridgeheads for British offensive operations against Italian possessions in East Africa. He had also occupied Moyale on the frontier of Kenya. Subsequently his forces had occupied British Somaliland while the French Somaliland had been neutralised and practically brought under Italian control. Italian position, however, was not very strong because of the rebellious disposition of a number of Abyssinian chiefs who had continued to harass the Fascist forces in Abyssinia. Owing to the inability of Marshal Graziani to defeat the British in Egypt and open that route for communication with Italian East Africa, the Duke of Aosta was unable to gain any reinforcements and supplies from the Metropolitan country. The long desert route from Libya was not practicable unless the Sudan had been eliminated as a British base. All that he could do was to hold to his possessions and create minor interference for British shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Owing to the political difficulties in Abyssinia and the military weakness, not only as a result of his isolation but also because of the low morale of his troops, the position of the Duke of Aosta was not a very happy one; and it was this factor which General Wavell was keen to exploit. His defeat was only a matter of time.

The British forces were stationed in two sectors. There were two Indian divisions with the Sudanese troops in the Sudan under the command of Lieut.-General W. Platt. The other force was to the south at a distance of nearly 1200 miles in Kenya under the command of Lieut.-General A. G. Cunningham. These were composed of African divisions. The plan which was now accepted was to foster rebellion in Abyssinia, and the Northern Force was to invade Eritrea, while the Southern one was to move against Italian Somaliland. In addition there was to be a third attack from the west by a guerilla force into Abyssinia. Air support was to be provided from the Sudan, Kenya and Aden. In a sense it was to be a big pincer movement with Khartoum and Nairobi as the two bases to squeeze Italian forces in Abyssinia and other parts of Italian East Africa. General Platt had under him the two Indian divisions, the 4th and the 5th, and he was asked to capture Kassala in February, while General Cunningham was to exert pressure on Moyale and, in May or June, to move on to Kismayu on the coast of Italian Somaliland. The main object of this plan was to help the Patriot Movement in Abyssinia to gain enough strength to make the Italian position untenable there. According to Playfair, "The reason for the capture of Kassala and

Kismayu was to deprive the enemy of likely lines of advance and so make it possible to withdraw troops from Kenya and the Sudan for use farther north." At the end of December the forced retreat of Italians from the Egyptian frontier made the assumption of East African operations a matter of urgency. The Chiefs of Staff desired "that operations to clear up Ethiopia should take priority next after those in the Western Desert and that the growing probability of a German advance through Bulgaria made it very desirable that the victory in Italian East Africa should be a speedy one."<sup>12</sup> The probability of being further involved in the Balkans and possibly in Western Asia expedited the commencement of the East African Campaign. The date was advanced because the Italians withdrew from Kassala even before any British move had begun. Playfair has rightly hinted that the disaster to Graziani might have influenced Aosta in this course. Italians' lack of stubbornness to fight, specially in times of adversity, encouraged General Wavell and the two commanding officers in East Africa to resort to an early action. The Chiefs of Staff also were keen for a similar development. They had issued a warning of possible aggressive action by the Japanese. They also told the Commanders-in-Chief of the British policy to support Greece and Turkey as well, which might involve the despatch of large forces to the Balkans from Africa. In spite of the urgency of these commitments General Wavell decided to begin operations in East Africa, but he did not want General Platt to have any very ambitious designs. All that he wanted of him was to occupy Eritrea but not advance into Abyssinia. Similarly General Cunningham was to content himself with the capture of port towns of Italian East Africa. There was urgency of rooting out opposition from Eritrea so that the Red Sea route might be absolutely safe to enable the United States to send her ships to Suez laden with supplies for the British.

General Platt began his advance from Kassala on 19th January, and the next day he was within the borders of Eritrea. Within a few days Agordat had been captured by the Indian troops and thereafter began the pursuit by the Indian forces on the Kassala-Asmara road on the way to Massawa which was the objective of Platt's campaign. The Keren defile on the route offered the first obstacle to the active advance of the Indian forces, but this was captured by 24 January. The first major stand by the Italians was taken at Keren. Here the battle was fought by the Indian forces with grim determination, and it was after a fighting of more than a month that the Italians withdrew from Keren, and by the end of March the first great obstacle to further advance was thus removed. The loss was considerable but the battle was a decisive one for, after the failure of this stubborn stand the Italians could

not fight with determination again. From Keren the Italian columns had retreated to Asmara which was the next point in Italian defence. The surrounding road from Keren to Asmara afforded scope for delaying action. The Italians had made preparations to oppose the Indian advance at Ad Teclesan, an important defensive position on the road. This was to form the last ditch before Asmara whose protection was vital for the safety of Eritrea. However, the Italian preparations could not avail against the attack of the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade which was able to defeat the Italians there on 31 March. The fall of Asmara was not long delayed, for the next day the Italians there surrendered. The fall of Asmara opened the way for plucking Massawa also which fell soon thereafter and the Italian navy based on that port was destroyed. This vital port town was captured on 8 April by the combined efforts of the 7th and 10th Indian Infantry Brigades. The harbour had been damaged, the ships had been scuttled, and a great deal of equipment and supplies had been thrown into the sea. None-the-less the gain of Massawa was a major advantage in that the port was now available for the supply of the forces operating in Eritrea and poised for the invasion of Ethiopia. With this success the strategic objective, viz to remove the threat to shipping in the Red Sea had been attained and it was now possible for the American ships to enter these waters.

Meanwhile the Southern Force based on Nairobi in Kenya under General Cunningham had also adopted its offensive and begun its advance on 24 January. After recapturing Moyale the African troops moved against Kismayu which was occupied on 14 February. The next objective was Mogadishu which fell to him soon thereafter with a large supply of petrol and aviation spirit which were not destroyed by the Italians. So far General Cunningham had not met with any strong resistance. He had, however, succeeded in occupying the three main ports of Italian Somaliland which were now utilised for bringing in supplies from Mombasa. This success emboldened him to move northwards on his way to Addis Ababa. His next objective was Harar. Meanwhile Berbera, the main town of British Somaliland, was occupied by a detachment operating from Aden. General Cunningham's army set out for Giggia on the way to Harar on 1 March 1941, where it arrived on the 17th. The next stage of occupying Harar was not long delayed as the town was captured on the 25th. Within one month thus this force from the south had covered more than a thousand miles of distance and had destroyed all Italian positions on the Indian Ocean. From Harar, General Cunningham started for Addis Ababa, which had been abandoned by the Duke of Aosta, and occupied it on 4 April. By this time the northern fork of the pincer had finished off all resistance in Eritrea and was in position in Asmara to move further south. The southern fork

had reached Addis Ababa. The next move was to open the Asmara-Addis Ababa road so that Massawa might be used effectively for the passage of troops and supplies to Egypt. But the Italians had entrenched themselves at Amba Alagi which was their last stronghold in Eastern Africa. In April the Duke of Aosta having no hopes of retaining hold on Eritrea any longer, decided to make Amba Alagi as his centre of resistance. At that time the Italian forces in Ethiopia were concentrated in three centres, viz. Gala Sidamo, Gondar and Amba Alagi. At the last place the Viceroy himself came with his reserve troops and the remnants of the Eritrean army. On the other side there was urgency for the clearing off of the Asmara road. Hence the 5th Indian Division was ordered to besiege Amba Alagi and destroy the Italian forces there. This Indian formation pressed from the north and was soon attacking Amba Alagi. The Southern Force also was moving on this point, but it met with strong resistance near Daisy and was delayed. However, the pressure by the Indian Division had exhausted the endurance of the besieged and on 16 May negotiations began for an armistice. The Italians surrendered on 19 May. With this success the campaign in East Africa practically ended though resistance continued for some months at Gondar.

The Patriots in Ethiopia had risen everywhere, and on 5 May the Emperor had reached his capital. The last Italian stand at Gondar was also liquidated in November 1941, but it was possible for the Middle East Command to transfer the bulk of the forces to Egypt. The two Indian divisions were ordered to go to the Western Desert and take part in the campaign there. The Italians had suffered a complete loss of their forces which had been destroyed, captured or dispersed and their eastern empire had been completely liquidated. The Ethiopians were free once again and in a position to join the Allies in their grim struggle against the Axis. The Middle East strategy in this region was pre-eminently offensive. In contrast the Italians adopted a purely defensive strategy and failed to make any effective use of their naval or air forces to destroy British shipping in the Red Sea or even to attack the British and Indian troops which moved without fear of danger from above, and thus their mobility was greatly increased. The morale of the Italian troops, whether they belonged to the Metropolitan country or were drawn from Africa, was extremely low, and after the failures in the Western Desert and Greece it had ebbed further. The local situation in the region was also unpropitious for any determined resistance to the British forces. The colonial forces were weak, danger of internal disorder had enhanced and the efforts of the Patriots were making their task much more difficult. The generalship and direction was in the worst position, and it was more owing to the lack of leadership that surrenders followed and positions were abandoned without offering resistance. On the

other side the British commanders exploited the weaknesses of their opponents. The British strategy grew with every success and it was the lack of resistance to them which made them sweep over the region and occupy a very large part of it within such a short time. The two Indian divisions had fought with vigour and their valiant attacks at Keren and Amba Alagi remain outstanding achievements of this force which had won many laurels in the Second World War.

The Italians had suffered three major defeats within the course of a few months in 1941. They had lost Cyrenaica. They had been pushed back in Greece and now East Africa was also lost to them. With these reverses, Italians as major combatants had been practically wiped out. Their defeats compelled the Germans to take up the task not only of reinforcing the Italians but of actually taking over the fight both in Greece as well as in Libya. Just at the time when the last of the Italian strongholds were being cleared in East Africa, General Rommel had started his advance eastwards from Tripolitania. He had trained his troops in desert fighting in Germany by simulating similar conditions in the country. His force was able to cross the Mediterranean without being detected and interfered with by the Royal Navy. The German aircraft had bases in Sicily and Tripoli from where they intensified reconnaissance of the Mediterranean and spread protective cover over the Axis convoys crossing between Sicily and Tripoli. In February and March, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy were preoccupied in rendering aid to Greece and therefore they were unable to provide any effective blockade in the Central Mediterranean. The Axis ships were thus free to transport to North Africa all that General Rommel required and he was in a position to build up a strong force consisting of two German armoured divisions, one Italian armoured and five infantry divisions and considerable German motorized infantry. He had 300 German tanks and supporting field and anti-tank artillery. The German air force had transferred a large number of aircraft to Libya thus contesting the air superiority with the Royal Air Force in the Middle East.

The presence of General Rommel and his force was not known to the General Headquarters at Cairo, though a number of signs were there of the presence of German troops in the theatre. The intelligence reports had led the Chiefs of Staff to send a warning telegram to General Wavell and asking for his appreciation. But General Wavell did not consider the information to be quite definite and his view was that, in spite of the German activity in Libya, the Axis would not be able to begin offensive operations in less than two months when the start of summer would prevent them from taking to desert warfare before July. He had

miscalculated and was unable to appreciate the realities correctly. The position of the British forces in March 1941 was hardly favourable for resisting a German attack. Apart from the thinning on account of the aid rendered to Greece, the equipment was not adequate and the line of communication had been considerably extended. The forward troops were supplied from the ports of Benghazi and Tobruk but even then the distances were considerable. The main formations in North Africa at the time were 2nd Armoured Division, 2nd Support Group, 9th Australian Division and 3rd Indian Motor Brigade comprising 2 Royal Lancers and 11 and 18 Frontier Force Cavalry. This small force was inadequate for the defence of Cyrenaica extending from Bardia to El Agheila.

The Afrika Korps struck its first blow on 31st March. The instructions to the Cyrenaica Command were to delay the Axis advance from El Agheila to Benghazi for two months within which period it was not possible for any large reinforcements to arrive in the theatre. But General Rommel's Panzer Divisions would not brook any such delays. His forces moved against Msus where the British had a petrol dump, and the threat to Benghazi had also mounted which compelled its evacuation on 3 April. The next move of the Cyrenaica Command was to withdraw the 3rd Indian Armoured Brigade to Mekili and the 9th Australian Division to Derna. Meanwhile the Axis forces moved forward at a rapid pace by three separate routes: one along the coast and two across the desert. The British forces staged a rapid withdrawal, and a 50 mile procession moved along the coastal road towards Barce and beyond. The Australian Division could not reach Derna and its destination was to be Tobruk in view of the rapid German advance. This Division reached Tobruk on 9 April and there held on to the city of Tobruk and defied all Axis attempts to destroy the island of British resistance in the desert.

The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade played a notable part at Mekili to which it was directed. General Rommel could not afford to leave this formation in his rear and therefore, before rushing eastwards to occupy Tobruk, he had to direct his attention to this Indian formation at Mekili. The Indian Brigade had been ordered to reach Mekili before 5 April and to hold that place until the arrival of the 2nd Armoured Division and the 9th Australian Division. Neither of these formations reached Mekili, as a consequence of which the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade was the only formation left at Mekili and placed in a perilous situation. This position commanded the junction of desert tracks directly in the path of the Axis advance and, therefore, it was bound to be attacked and wiped out before the Axis armoured forces could



move farther. The Brigade arranged its units to defend the vital perimeter, but before the Brigade Commander had arranged his dispositions the advanced elements of the Afrika Korps had reached Mekili. The forward elements of the Indian Brigade were in contact with the Axis forces and refused to allow easy passage to them. On 6 April, the Germans sent an officer under a white flag to demand the surrender of Mekili fort. But the offer was refused. The next day the Axis forces prepared an all-out attack on Mekili, but before any action was taken another offer of surrender was made. General Rommel sent a personal message offering to give the honours of war to the surrendering garrison. This offer was also rejected. It was decided to withdraw and the morning of 8 April was fixed for the move. They were attacked which they met with determination. A portion of the Brigade was destroyed and some prisoners were taken by the Germans. But quite a number of units broke through. With this withdrawal of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade the way was clear for General Rommel to advance to Tobruk but before he could reach there, the Australian Division had stabilised its position there and was in a position to withstand the German attack. The delay imposed on General Rommel's advance by the Indian Brigade had made it possible. The Mekili stand of the Indian Brigade was an episode of far-reaching significance. It was fought under unfavourable circumstances and in a deteriorating situation. The delay of more than two days which it imposed on Rommel's force before its destruction, was a bold action which prevented the Afrika Korps from capturing Tobruk which remained a thorn in the Axis side. The Western Desert Force had succeeded in regaining its base in Egypt where the 4th Indian Division joined.

The month of April 1941 was a gloomy period for the British. They had lost their advantage in North Africa and were faced with a major fear of attack on the Egyptian frontier. Greece had been evacuated and the strategic island of Crete was annexed by the Germans. The situation in the Balkans was turning against them. The Germans were in control of Roumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece, and it was a matter of time only when they might direct their armies against Turkey and Syria, Palestine or Iraq. In Iraq a pro-Axis government had been established. In Iran also elements favourable to the Axis were forging ahead. The French forces in Syria were hostile to the British though East Africa had been conquered. The situation everywhere else was growing desperate for the British.



## CHAPTER V

# Operations in West Asia; and Plans against German Attacks 1941

The Government of India had been not unjustifiably sensitive about the existence of any influence other than the British in the states of Western Asia. In the last century this region had become a suitable field for the rival ambitions of European Powers. The United Kingdom, France and Russia, all had political designs there and sought to exercise control over Turkey, Iran or the states of the Persian Gulf. Later Germany also developed financial and strategic interests in that area by initiating a programme of peaceful penetration at Constantinople. Through the influence with the Porte the project of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway was launched which might open Western Asia up to the Persian Gulf and afford prospect of exploitation of the economic and natural resources of the Middle East. This railway scheme naturally made the British apprehensive about their own interests in the Middle East and the security of their empire in India. The French and the Russian Governments were also greatly excited about this interposition of Germany in a region of vast potentialities and immense strategic significance. One of the major irritants which brought about the Great War in 1914 was the entry of Germany in this explosive land of West Asia.

After the end of the Great War, the Turkish Empire was disintegrated and a number of states were carved out including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan and Saudi Arabia. The Versailles Settlement had provided for a system of mandated territories under which the British acquired the mandatory rights over Iraq and Palestine while the French had Syria under their control. The state of Iraq grew restive under the mandate which was relinquished by the British Government, and subject to a treaty of defence, the kingdom was made independent. The treaty bound Iraq to afford the United Kingdom aid in case of war and to allow the full use of her communications for the passage of British troops through the country. This treaty was to last 25 years and inducted a diplomatic and defensive alliance between Iraq and the British, who secured air bases near Basra and Baghdad, which were to become important stations on the air route to India. The British were also given the right to maintain local levies for the ground defence of these bases and a right to

transport their military forces and supplies across Iraq at all times, whether in peace or in war. The British navy obtained the use of the Shatt-al-Arab. Accordingly a few squadrons of the Royal Air Force were stationed at Habbaniya, and the British land forces were withdrawn from the country. The relations between the two countries remained friendly thereafter. As the Second World War approached nearer, the British Government and the Government of India grew more conscious of the importance of that state in their general scheme of defence of the British Empire.

However, in the period after 1935 Fascist and Nazi propaganda was directed against the Arab states and Iraq could not remain unaffected by it. German influence was active among the officer ranks of the Iraqi army. The Mufti of Jerusalem, when expelled from Palestine, sought refuge in Iraq and imported greater strength to the Axis influence in that country. It is very difficult to be definite about German interests in Western Asia at this time. But it may be assumed that they were pre-eminently strategic in character and were directed towards the disruption of the vital British imperial communications which passed through that region. Moreover, exploitation of oil resources and control over the Persian Gulf so as to gain a strategic position close to the Indian and Russian frontiers, might have been the other objects which the Nazi Government cherished. It may be surmised that in these objects there was a revival of the *drang nach osten* of the 19th Century with all its explosive implications.

In the previous chapters mention has been made of the vital British interests in the Middle East and their efforts to defend them against Italian opposition. When Italy joined the war, the British Government directed its resources to defeat the Fascist military strength in North Africa, which had been to a large extent successful. The British had also, by the spring of 1941, destroyed the Italian empire in East Africa. At this juncture, realising the danger of the collapse of Italy in Africa, Hitler decided to throw in his military might to restore the balance in the Mediterranean and prevent the region from being wholly dominated by the British. He was conscious of the possibility of North Africa, Greece and the Dodecanese being utilised as bases for air raids on Italy, Southern Germany and, more than that, the Roumanian oilfields which supplied the vital oil resources for the Germans. Therefore, as has been mentioned earlier, Hitler sent his armies to fight in Greece and thereby brought the whole of the Balkans under his sway. He also sent General Rommel with an armoured corps to Tripolitania to fortify the Italian will to fight and to stem the tide of British advance westwards in Africa. Early in April 1941, this

entry of the German element in the fight in Libya created a new and much more serious problem for the British, and though they had liquidated the Axis danger in East Africa and thereby secured the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean route, the situation was not one free from menace to their position in the Middle East. It was then that in Iraq also a fresh danger arose which, unless tackled immediately, might grow into a major threat in the rear of their position in the Mediterranean region.

With the independence of Iraq the new government had not been without its troubles at home. The young King Ghazi had to handle the difficult task of controlling the turbulent elements in the country, and he had succeeded to an extent in bringing peace to his land. But before his mission was completed he died in a motor accident and was succeeded by a minor who was only four years of age at the time of his accession. The responsibility for government thereupon devolved on the uncle Emir Abdul Illa, who became the Regent. With Nurial-al-Said, the Prime Minister, the Regent maintained friendly ties with the British Government, and, when the war broke out, he agreed to abide loyally by the terms of the treaty of 1930. The German Legation in Baghdad was closed and the German subjects residing in Iraq were interned. But only a few months after, in April 1940, there was a major political change leading to the emergence of Rashid Ali el Gilani as Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister did not equally adhere to friendship with the British, for when Italy declared war, he was unwilling to close the Italian Legation or intern the Italian subjects living in the country. Very probably Rashid Ali was influenced by the Axis propaganda and had subscribed to the aspirations of Arab nationalism and pan-Arab extremism. Also the fortunes of the Allies were passing through critical times, and it was problematical whether they would succeed against the Axis. Therefore, the new Government of Iraq was not prepared to be drawn into the war on the side of the British, and was not in a mood to take any extreme measures against the Italians. The Italian Legation was allowed to continue and become the centre of Axis propaganda and activities. But Rashid Ali did not long remain in power for he resigned early in 1941, when Taha-el-Hashimi became the Prime Minister. However, Rashid Ali was biding his time and, incited and helped by Axis influence, he seized power by a *coup d'etat* in April 1941. He was helped by the senior officers of the army and air force who worked as a team and were known as the Golden Square. They had command of the main divisions of the army and air force. They subscribed to the principles of pan-Arab movement which adhered to the principle of Arab Federation, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and which believed that the British with their

vital imperial interests in the Middle East were the chief obstacle in the attainment of this goal.

The Mufti of Jerusalem was the main inspiration behind this movement, and he was seeking Axis support for the achievement of his object. The German Minister in Baghdad, before his expulsion, helped the movement by his propaganda and subsidies. With the expulsion of the Germans the work was not interrupted because the Italian and the Japanese Legations continued to render assistance. Rashid Ali with his Golden Square had been brought under the influence of this group. Therefore when the Regent and the British Ambassador decided to deal firmly with the anti-British clique by transferring some of the prominent military officers from their positions, the Golden Square refused to obey or implement the transfer orders, and a crisis was created on the first day of April 1941. The troops picketed the main buildings and roads in Baghdad. The Regent fled to Habbaniya, and Rashid Ali with his Golden Square promptly seized power. Taha-el-Hashimi resigned, and on 3 April, Rashid Ali assumed full control of the Government as Chief of the National Defence Government. A new Regent was elected. The *ex*-Regent Amir Abdul Illah fled to Basra and took refuge in a British gun-boat and was taken to Trans-jordan. The coming to power of Rashid Ali with his pro-Axis inclinations and the circumstances in which he had assumed control of government, made it clear that Iraq was now definitely drawn into the vortex of the Axis, and that unless effective measures were immediately adopted to restore British control a serious strategic danger would arise in the Middle East.

Iraq not only lay on the imperial air route to the east but through that country also passed the main oil pipelines which carried the produce of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to the Mediterranean sea coast. If Iraq were to be subject to Nazi control, the danger was that the Persian Gulf, which was at this stage the main door for the movement of supplies and forces from India, the Dominions and the United States, would be closed for British traffic and that the alternative road overland to Palestine and Egypt would not be available for use by them. Another major danger was that with Iraq under their control, the Germans would be able to turn the northern flanks of the British Middle East forces and exert pressure both in Turkey and Syria, to let the German troops pass through their territories or be stationed there. The attitude of Vichy elements in Syria was equivocal, but it was certain that with Iraq under German hold the French in Syria would, as they later did, necessarily side with the Germans. In that situation, with the Balkans securely in the grip of the Germans, the British position in Palestine and in the Nile Delta would be

subject to extreme threat, and also no reliance could then be placed on Turkish adherence to British friendship. But more serious perhaps was the fear that with Iraq as their base, the Germans would dominate Iran, where already their influence was fairly active, and stage an invasion of India from the west. The attitude of Afghanistan in that eventuality could be in doubt. Thus the danger was that right from the Mediterranean to the borders of India both the land and ocean approaches would be completely dominated by the Germans, and the threat to the security of this country would become grave, specially as Japan was known to be harbouring aggressive intentions from the east.

The possibilities of a new danger in Asia and the fear of being caught up in North Africa between the German attack from the west by Rommel and from the east through Syria and Palestine, compelled the British Government to view with alarm the turn which events had taken in Iraq. It could not, in this situation, let Rashid Ali and his anti-British military group continue to be in power without serious detriment to its security. But the problem was how to oust him from his new position.

The British Ambassador broke off official relations with the new government which he did not regard as constitutional. Rashid Ali, however, was keen to legalise his position and was desirous of establishing full diplomatic relations with the British. This attitude might have been influenced by the fact that he had not yet received any support from the Germans and that he was not prepared to antagonise the British before he was sure of his position on the other side. The British Government, when informed of the seizure of power by Rashid Ali, appreciated the new danger and asked General Wavell to indicate what forces he would be able to spare for military intervention in Iraq. They also tried to find from the British Ambassador the possibilities of successful resistance to Rashid Ali in his own country. To the British Ambassador it was clear that the old Regent could not come back to power without adequate British military support. In his opinion only three courses were open to the British Government at the time : first, that military intervention might be resorted to which would have to be directed against the hostile portion of the Iraqi army. If Rashid Ali continued in power longer he would be able to strengthen his hold in the country and then military operations would have to be much more comprehensive. The second course was that Rashid Ali might be informed that the British Government would have no dealings with him and thereby to squeeze him into submission. But this course would be scarcely fruitful if the hope of German support to him was real. The third course which he suggested was that Rashid Ali might be recognised; but this was

inconceivable in view of his pro-Axis leanings. The British Ambassador himself favoured the first course. But that would depend on the military situation and the availability of troops. The attitude of Rashid Ali and his measures against the British left no doubt of the radical change in the Middle East situation which would not be remedied without armed intervention. It is at this time that the Government of India, by adopting a definite attitude, altered the situation and helped to save Iraq and the whole Middle East from definitely falling under Axis control.

The Government of India had accepted the commitment before the war of providing troops to the Persian Gulf area, to maintain the security of the Anglo-Iranian oilfields and for meeting any emergency which might develop in the Middle Eastern theatre. In August 1939 the General Staff had prepared a plan known as K-3 for the move of a force to Iran, primarily for the purpose of defending the oilfield area from any Russian threat which might mount in that region. Subsequently the danger of Russian attack on Iraq and Iran was considered and, for the protection of the oilfields as well as to ensure the internal security of Iraq, India was asked to make available three divisions to be supplied from here. This force was to be maintained for operations in the Iraq-Iran area. Later when France had succumbed to the German invasion and the situation had considerably deteriorated for the British, the Chiefs of Staff in England issued a directive to India, on 10 July 1940, defining the role of the force which was to be sent to the Persian Gulf area. The appreciation at the time was that the Axis might invade Iraq through Syria, or stir up a revolt there to undermine British influence and the Shah of Iran might also simultaneously turn hostile to the British. Therefore the role of the Indian force, which was known as Trout, was to establish a bridgehead at Basra to protect the oilfields, strengthen the morale of the friendly government of Iraq and deter hostile elements there from interrupting the overland line of communication to Palestine. However, owing to the preoccupation of the Axis with the Battle of Britain, no immediate action was taken to implement the scheme. But in December 1940, when the danger to the Middle East grew, the War Office once again elaborated the role of the force which was now designated as Sabine. The purpose of this force was to check Axis attack on Iraq through Turkey or Syria, to prevent internal disturbances in the area of the oilfields in Iraq and generally to meet a powerful Axis attack in the region. In accordance with this directive the General Staff in India drew up its appreciation in February 1941, which was based upon the eventuality of an invasion of Iraq from the north by the Axis and the Russian forces. It also took cognizance of the possibility of Iraq turning hostile to the Allies and making air bases available to the Axis. The plan

provided for the landing of a force in southern Iraq and establishing a bridgehead in the neighbourhood of Basra, and turning Basra into a base for establishing forces in the Baghdad-Habbaniya area and also to hold them in upper Iraq in the direction of Syria. In the month of March, discussions on the plan continued between General Wavell, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London and General Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief of India. General Auchinleck was extremely keen to "gain a foothold in Iraq". He said, "The sooner we begin to get control militarily in Iraq the better."

The basis of the plan made under his inspiration was the occupation of Basra and using it as a bridgehead for advance inwards and also for controlling the situation both on the Iranian side as well as in Baghdad. The conference at Cairo which was held in March 1941 did not, however, accept this view and felt that in the existing war situation in the Middle East, it would not be proper to tie up a large force in Iraq, and that the fulfilment of the object of controlling Baghdad might be served by sending a force from Palestine. The conference had also appreciated the threat to the oilfields in Iran. The general opinion there was that steps should be taken to protect the Royal Air Force bases and the air route to Iraq, the Kirkuk oilfields, and the pipeline to Haifa, as well as efforts should be made to control land communications from Basra to Haifa and from Turkey to Iraq. This would be easily achieved by supporting a friendly government against subversive influences or intimidating a hostile government and ejecting it in case of need. The policy outlined by the conference was, therefore, to open the line of communications from Basra to Transjordan and to install sufficient guards at both Basra and Habbaniya to ensure full control over these places, and to provide a striking force which would operate at the centre of the Government of Iraq and overcome its military resistance, when it might be deemed necessary. According to the conference the striking force was to be located in Transjordan so that even with limited strength it might be in a position to strike swiftly, which, the conference thought, would not be the case if India were to despatch troops. This view was not acceptable to the Government of India whose definite opinion was that Basra must be occupied without delay as a preliminary to the initiation of military operations in Iraq and Iran.

Thus when the situation deteriorated in Iraq, at the beginning of April, there was no agreement in respect of action between the Middle East and the India Command. No plan had yet been prepared for operations. The force Sabine was not ready. Meanwhile, events were taking a serious turn in Iraq. On 6

April, Rashid Ali had passed orders preventing the Royal Air Force personnel from leaving Habbaniya. The wireless transmitting sets at Sulaimaniya and Mosul were confiscated, and in the next few days Rashid Ali had considerably strengthened his power which, in the opinion of the British Ambassador, would require armed intervention in considerable strength if he was to be dislodged from the position he had acquired politically in the country. In view of the deteriorating situation the War Office had enquired from General Wavell about the troops he might be able to despatch to Iraq. His reply was received on 7 April in which he had mentioned that "in the case of most extreme urgency he might be able to move one British battalion from Palestine." All that he suggested was that there might be an air demonstration, and a strong declaration of policy by the British which he thought might have effect. According to him nothing else could be done at the moment. General Wavell was concerned about the situation in North Africa and the Balkans and was reluctant to extend the field of his involvement, particularly in view of his limited military resources. He naturally felt that any intervention in Iraq would lead to the extension of the war in Western Asia, which he wanted to avoid at that stage, so that the British resources might be directed solely to the removal of danger to the west of Egypt. He had informed his Government that anything he could send would be both inadequate and too late. It would leave Palestine most dangerously weak. In his telegram he had made it clear "that no assistance could be given to Iraq from Palestine in present circumstances, and have always advised that a commitment in Iraq should be avoided. My forces are stretched to the limit everywhere and I simply cannot afford to risk part of them on what cannot produce any effect."<sup>1</sup>

As against this attitude of Wavell, the India Command did not hesitate to offer full support by sending reinforcements for Iraq. The Government of India had felt the growing danger in Iraq as a threat to the security of India, and fully conscious of the responsibility for Iraq and Iran, the India Command was prepared to take effective action so that the Axis threat in the Persian Gulf area might be nipped in the bud. Therefore, when on 8 April 1941, the Secretary of State for India informed the Viceroy of the critical situation in Iraq and enquired if India would make available a suitable force for the occupation of Basra, the Government of India immediately offered to divert the brigade which was embarking for Malaya to the Persian Gulf. Offer was also made of despatching by air to Shuaiba a British infantry unit of 400 men with light machine-guns and anti-tank rifles. This alacrity and prompt response from General Auchinleck was in

1. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol III, p. 227.



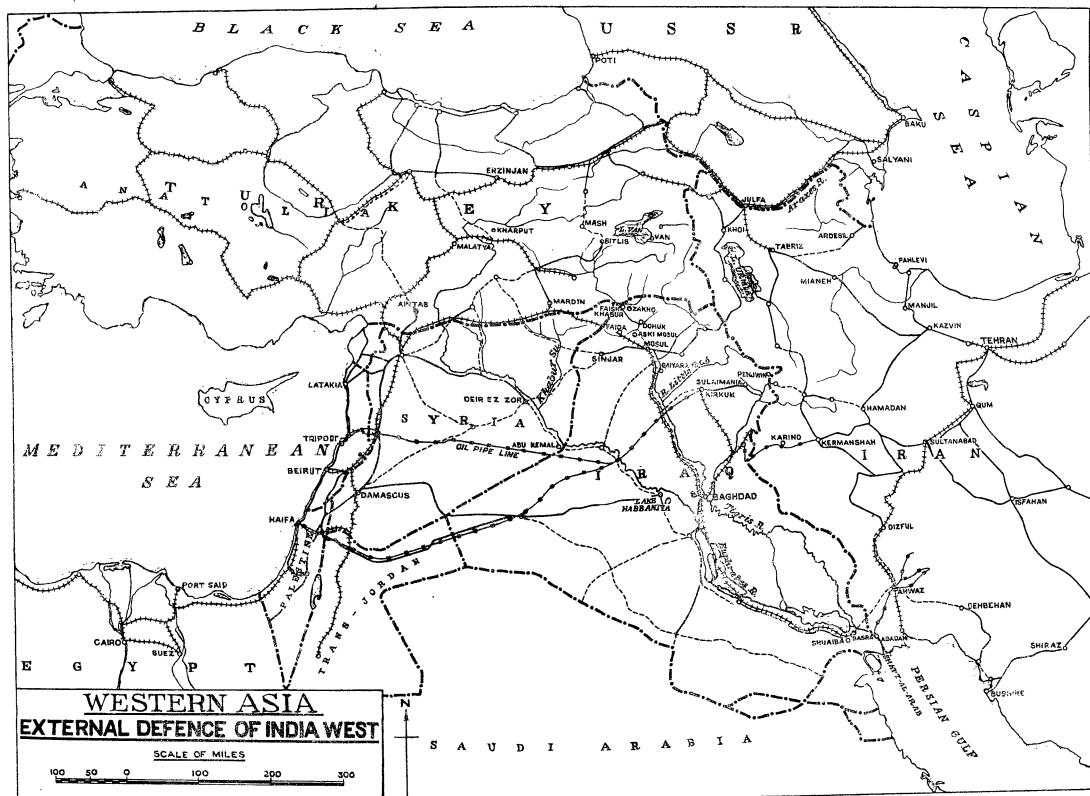
sharp contrast to the halting and reluctant mood of General Wavell, whose attitude is clear from his cable to the Chiefs of Staff of 5 May, quoted by Mr. Churchill in his book; "I feel it my duty to warn you in the gravest possible terms that I consider the prolongation of fighting in Iraq will seriously endanger the defence of Palestine and Egypt. The political repercussions will be incalculable and may result in what I have spent nearly two years trying to avoid, *viz.*, serious internal trouble in our bases. I therefore urge again most strongly that a settlement should be negotiated as early as possible."

General Auchinleck was fully apprized of the Axis danger in the Middle East, and, in the interest of security of India, was not prepared to take any risks. His stand, therefore, was that Rashid Ali's regime must be changed and a friendly government established in Baghdad, but this, he thought, would be possible not by negotiations but only by military action. He also believed that unless a strong force was established in Iraq, the impending threat of German occupation of Iraq and Iran and subsequent danger of invasion to India would not be eliminated. Therefore, what he insisted upon was that the Sabine, comprising three divisions and ancillary troops, must be despatched and that the brigade which he had offered should form a bridgehead at Basra for the eventual arrival of the remaining forces. Mr. Churchill was impressed by the audacity and alacrity of General Auchinleck and, having full knowledge of the Axis influence working on Rashid Ali, he decided to fall into line with the suggestions of the India Command. The British Government sent definite orders therefore to General Wavell to the following effect :

"...Settlement by negotiation cannot be entertained except on the basis of a climb down by Iraqis, with safeguard against future Axis designs on Iraq. Realities of the situation are that Rashid Ali has all along been hand-in-glove with Axis Powers, and was merely waiting until they could support him before exposing his hand. Our arrival at Basra forced him to go off at half-cock before the Axis was ready. Thus there is an excellent chance of restoring the situation by bold action, if it is not delayed.

"Chiefs of Staff have therefore advised Defence Committee that they are prepared to accept responsibility for despatch of the force specified in your telegram at the earliest possible moment. Defence Committee direct that Air Vice-Marshal Smart should be informed that he will be given assistance, and that in the meanwhile it is his duty to defend Habbaniya to the last. Subject to the security of Egypt being maintained, maximum air support possible should be given to operations in Iraq."

The offer of the Government of India to send a brigade to Basra and follow it up by two further brigade groups and base units was accepted by the British Government on 10 April 1941. The convoys sailed from Karachi with Headquarters 10th Indian Division and the troops of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade. Under the terms of the treaty, Rashid Ali was bound to permit the landing of this force, but it was feared that there might be an opposed landing. The British Ambassador did not want to force the events. In his telegram to the Foreign Office he mentioned that the secret arrival of the troops would be difficult to justify and that Rashid Ali would represent the measure as an act of aggression on the part of the British which he might exploit to rally the people in his favour. He therefore advised that the arrival of the troops might be deferred. Rashid Ali, about this time, had declared his intention of respecting his international obligations and his resolve to carry out the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty. The Ambassador, therefore, was of the view that the British Government must have some definite justification for the despatch of the troops, and had suggested that he might employ the ruse of telling the Premier that the troops would be required elsewhere and that he might permit a rapid passage for them through his country. If Rashid Ali refused, the British Government would have perfect right to take whatever action they thought proper. The Chiefs of Staff in England were agreeable to the postponement by a few days of the arrival of the Indian brigade so that Rashid Ali might be sounded. They had suggested that the Indian convoy might be detained at Bahrein or somewhere else on the route. This suggestion was not acceptable to General Auchinleck and the Government of India, who felt that the disclosure of the fact of entry of the Indian force would deprive it of the element of secrecy and surprise. They believed that it was essential to have the force at Basra without any delay as that would make a vital difference in the situation in the Middle East. General Auchinleck disagreed with the decision of the War Office and did not want Rashid Ali to be given any time to invoke Axis aid, which he thought was bound to come. This protest by the Government of India made the British Government accept the suggestion that the expedition should reach Basra as planned. The fears of the British Ambassador and the War Office, however, proved illusory for the landing was not opposed and Rashid Ali had to put up with the accomplished fact. The convoy carrying the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade entered the Shatt-al-Arab on 17 April. The Indian troops landed at Basra without any opposition and the Headquarters of the Brigade was established at Makina. Also 400 men of the British battalion were flown into Shuaiba from Karachi where they were employed for protecting the aerodrome.



On the one hand, the Government of India and the War Cabinet were agreed on further reinforcements to arrive in Iraq so that the entire Sabine force consisting of three divisions might be established in that area. On the other hand, Rashid Ali grew apprehensive of the motives of the British and felt that he was being surrounded by British forces and that there might be a military occupation of his country, which he was resolved to prevent. Soon after the landing of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, he informed the Ambassador that he had agreed to the disembarkation of the force merely on the understanding that Iraqi territory would be used only for a rapid passage of the troops to Palestine. He told very definitely that he would not permit a military occupation of his country on the excuse that troops were required for the protection of base and lines of communication, which might remain in the country indefinitely. On 18 April he warned the British Ambassador that in order to retain the goodwill of Iraq, the troops must be moved to Palestine at once, that no further troops should arrive before their departure and that in future previous notice should be given of the arrival of troops which should not at any time exceed one brigade group in his country. The Ambassador was agreeable to make concessions to the Iraqi dictator, but the Government of India could not agree with his view, for they had not sent the troops to Iraq merely for opening lines of communication to Palestine. Their object definitely was the stationing of troops in Iraq against any possible threat of Axis infiltration. The British Government was in full agreement with the Government of India. It was decided on 23 April that one division should be the minimum force in Iraq and that Basra should be developed for receiving the other divisions of Sabine. Rashid Ali was resolved not to permit it and, in full assurance of Axis support, refused permission for further landings of Indian troops, which radically altered the situation at the close of the month and paved the way for armed conflict in that country.

Rashid Ali had been assured of German support and was told that the Nazi Government was in full sympathy with him and would do everything possible to help him. But up to the end of April no definite assistance was forthcoming, in the absence of which it was unlikely for Rashid Ali to oppose landing of Indian troops which arrived and disembarked without any incident on 29 April. Rashid Ali had given up the idea of defending Basra which was not practicable and instead tried to concentrate his forces to prevent the establishment of any large British force in Baghdad or in its neighbourhood. He was determined to hold Baghdad, the capital of the country. This attitude of his posed danger to the British air force personnel in Habbaniya and the British President at the capital. Rashid Ali mobilised his troops,

and nearly two infantry brigades supported by artillery and mechanized units encamped on the high ground overlooking the British aerodrome and cantonment of Habbaniya. Another brigade occupied Ramadi, west of Habbaniya, having as its object the prevention of British reinforcements from Palestine reaching the British troops in Iraq. The Iraqi troops had also occupied the oil-fields at Kirkuk and had cut off the flow of oil to Haifa and diverted it to Syria so that it might be available to the Vichy French there who were at the time under German domination and collaborating with the Axis. On 30 April, the British Air Officer Commanding at Habbaniya was prohibited from employing his aircraft or sending any armoured car, and the threat of shelling from the Iraqi batteries was held out. This meant that British aircraft were not permitted to have their training. However, there was no hostile action taken by the Iraqi forces and they refrained from attacking the British. On 1 May the British Foreign Office authorized the Air Officer Commanding to bomb the Iraqi forces, which was done early in the morning of 2 May 1941. Action was thus initiated by the British leading to the elimination of Iraq as a power hostile to them. In the first few days was fought the battle of Habbaniya in which the Royal Air Force bombed the positions of the Iraqi army and also carried out air raids into Baghdad. The small British infantry force also joined the battle and the combined opposition led to the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from near Habbaniya.

The first phase of the fighting was thus soon brought to a successful termination. The second phase began on 8 May when the Hab Force from Palestine reached Habbaniya and preparations were made for the Indian troops at Basra also to converge on Baghdad. In this period the German air force also intervened in the fighting in Iraq. The column advancing from Palestine met with opposition at Rutba and Faluja, both of which were soon occupied in spite of the strenuous resistance by the Iraqi forces. With the fall of Faluja on 23 May the road to Baghdad was laid open. From the other side the Indian forces, from their base at Basra, after defeating opposition in the Basra-Shuaiba area, commenced their move towards Habbaniya on 25 May. This operation known as Oakley was launched with the object of locating and destroying all Iraqi troops between Shuaiba and Ur and to maintain control over the railway between Ur and Basra. The Indian force succeeded in capturing Ur on 28 May and sent patrols from there to reconnoitre the neighbouring area. The 20th Indian Infantry Brigade thereupon began consolidation at Ur. Meanwhile the Hab Force from the other direction had begun its advance on Baghdad. It moved out of Faluja on the same day as the Indian force had occupied Ur. They made some

rapid advance but were held up about 12 miles from Baghdad by the canal, the bridge on which had been blown off. The Iraqi forces were entrenched on the other side of the canal. The next day the Iraqi positions were bombed by the Royal Air Force and shelled by the artillery from the other bank of the canal. On the 30th, after completing a bridge over the canal, advance resumed. On this day the entire Hab Force was concentrated in the outskirts of Baghdad. The presence of the Indian troops at Ur and the investment of Baghdad by the British force from Palestine compelled the Government of Iraq to ask for an armistice. Rashid Ali had fled from the country to Jerusalem and the leading elements of the Golden Square had also left along with some German and Italian agents. This flight of the hostile group in Baghdad made possible the desire for peace by the other sections which had maintained an attitude of friendliness towards the British. The Axis support had not been available in any substance. Apart from bombing the aerodrome and some minor positions the German air force had not been able to make any impression on the British will to fight. The Royal Air Force had, on the other hand, bombed Mosul and other airfields in Syria, thereby preventing the German aircraft from using those airfields to make any effective attack on the British positions in Iraq. The Nazis were not in a position to send any land force or render any other effective assistance to Rashid Ali. Probably Rashid Ali had rushed matters before the Germans had made any preparations to render him effective support. The result was that Rashid Ali was unable to hold long against the determined British attack, and after his flight the provisional Iraqi Government asked for armistice which was signed on 31 May in Baghdad. Thus ended the opposition and hostility of Iraq. The old Regent arrived the next day and a friendly government to the British was established in the country leaving Iraq as an important base for Allied operations.

"Thus", as Churchill writes, "the German plan for raising rebellion in Iraq and mastering cheaply this wide area was frustrated on a small margin. They had of course at their disposal an airborne force which would have given them at this time Syria, Iraq, and Persia, with their precious oilfields. Hitler's hand might have reached out very far towards India, and beckoned to Japan." The success in Iraq had not, however, made for absolute security in the Middle East. Almost at the same time as Rashid Ali was being expelled from Baghdad the German airborne troops had landed on Crete and compelled the British forces there to leave the island to the Nazis. Once again a mighty effort was made to evacuate the troops back to Egypt and 16,500 men were safely brought back there. But the loss was immense. Almost half the force had been destroyed. This set-back affected the situation in the Mediterranean.

The Royal Navy in that sector was weakened; but more than that the Germans had got a stepping stage for acquiring a foothold on the mainland of West Asia. With their control over the Balkans, it would have been easy for them, but for Turkish neutrality, to transport their armoured force across the Straits into Asia. But that route was at the moment closed for them. The other alternative route was to hop from Greece through Crete to Syria where the Vichy French were favourable to their cause, largely owing to their chagrin with the British. At the time when Rashid Ali had raised the flag of opposition, the German air force had used the Syrian aerodromes for bombing the British positions in Iraq. If Syria were allowed to fall under German domination the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean would have become deplorable and the advantage gained in Iraq might have been neutralised. The next step therefore for the British was to forestall the Germans in Syria and deny that ground for the formation of a bridgehead for a major German invasion of Asia. The Vichy authorities had provided a pretence for attack by offering their landing grounds and the use of the Syrian railways to the Germans. Also the Nazi agents had intensified their subversive activities.

On 15 May, Mr. Anthony Eden informed the House of Commons that Syrian airfields had been used by the Axis and warned the Vichy Government of the consequences. The French denied their complicity, but that did not prevent the British aircraft from attacking the Syrian airfields and an invasion was determined upon. The main object was to prevent the Germans from occupying Syria which would have afforded them the means not only of threatening Iraq but also the Iranian oilfields, the Palestine and Suez. The British Government asked General Wavell to prepare a force for operation in Syria, which began on 8 June and lasted for a month and three days. The British troops were aided by the Free French forces. In the beginning it was estimated that the French in Syria would not offer any effective resistance but this hope was soon belied. Their armed strength was not inconsiderable and the air force also was strong.

The British force consisted of an Australian division and the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade Group which had crossed from Egypt into Palestine on 16 May 1941. It is not necessary to go into the details of the operation in which the Indian troops fought alongside the Australians. The French resistance was strong but as in the case of Iraq, in Syria also any effective Axis intervention was not possible. Their air force could not operate from the Syrian airfields owing to their having been bombed by the Royal Air Force. Pressure of the British troops from two sides culminated in the capture of Damascus. This compelled General Dentz

to realise the hopelessness of his position. The Indian brigade at that moment was directed against Beirut, the threat to which was steadily mounting. Meanwhile Palmyra and many other important positions had fallen to the Allied forces. This made the General open negotiations for an armistice on 11 July. In taking this step he had been largely influenced by the losses inflicted by the Royal Air Force which had destroyed practically four-fifths of his air force. The Royal Navy had also taken a major toll in the destruction of transport and armoured vehicles on the coast road. The fire from the sea had lowered the morale of the troops. All these thrusts had weakened the will of the Syrian French authorities to continue the fight any longer and therefore they sought terms to end the hostilities. The armistice was signed on 14 July. According to its terms the British forces were to occupy Syria and Lebanon. Thus was liquidated one more field which might have been employed by the Axis in pursuance of their strategy in Western Asia. This victory gave to the British considerable advantage. They were not only now in a position to exploit the resources of Syria but also gained control over an important strategic area. The defence of the Middle East had been strengthened by this step and, as Churchill put it, it had greatly improved the strategic position in the Middle East. "It closed the door to any further attempt at enemy penetration eastwards from the Mediterranean, moved our defence of the Suez Canal northwards by 250 miles and relieved Turkey of anxiety for her southern frontier . . . . . The occupation and conquest of Syria, which was undertaken to meet a desperate need, ended, as it proved for ever, the German advance towards the Persian Gulf and India." There was, however, still one important chink in the armour of the Middle East to stop which the British Government had to adopt effective measures against Iran not long after the conquest of Syria.

The failure of Hitler to save Iraq and Syria from falling into the grips of the British had been largely the result of his ambitious plans to invade Soviet Russia. The Non-Aggression Pact between the two—Soviet Russia and Germany—was at best a temporary arrangement as it was unnatural for these two mighty Powers with conflicting ideologies to keep long in any pact of friendship. The German advance into Poland was fraught with dangerous consequences for the Soviet Union on their western frontier. It was this factor which had led to the division of Poland and the annexation of the Baltic States by Russia. It was the fear of German expansionism and their hold on the Baltic which had led to the Soviet invasion of Finland, specially at the time when the German influence had penetrated the Scandinavian peninsula. The patience of the Soviet rulers must have been considerably



tried by the mounting successes of the German arms in northern and western Europe, for it must have been clear to them that the end of resistance in the west would make Hitler so powerful as to be a real danger to the security of the Communist Russia. However, when Hitler under the pressure of circumstances directed his arms south-eastwards into the Balkans and had brought under his control, by friendly negotiations or armed intervention, the states of Hungary, Roumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece, the danger to the integrity of the Soviet territories must have become apparent. At the time when Hitler had sought for concessions in Roumania, Stalin had also laid claims on Dobrudja which must have made the Fuhrer conscious of the danger from Russia in his schemes of eastern expansion. It is difficult to say whether Hitler had been from the very beginning anxious to fight the Russians, but it must be surmised that with his failure to defeat British resistance he could not leave a strong, not very friendly, Russia in his rear if his plan was to defeat the British and thereby make his hold over Western Europe and his supremacy over the Continent complete and secure. Any schemes of entry into Asia and any designs of dominating Iraq, Iran and the regions of Central Asia with the ultimate object of invading India, could not have been realised without defeating the potential hostility and opposition of the Russians. These considerations led Hitler to invade Russia on 22 June 1941 and thus wage war on two fronts which German policy has traditionally striven to avoid. It was the preparations for his eastern adventure as well as the involvement in it which had weakened preparations for a decisive stroke in Northern Africa and prevented effective support to the French in Syria or to Rashid Ali in Iraq. The entry of Russia into the war was a boon for the British, who immediately proclaimed the Soviet Union as their ally. The Russian war "diverted the German air attack from Great Britain and diminished the threat of invasion. It gave us important relief in the Mediterranean." This is how Churchill viewed the entry of Russia into the war.

Extension of the war in the east, bringing the Soviet Government into it, and the alliance of the British with the Russians, prepared the stage for bringing Iran under Allied domination. Mr. Churchill has explained his reasons for the campaign in Persia thus : "The need to pass munitions and supplies of all kinds to the Soviet Government, and the extreme difficulties of the Arctic route, together with future strategic possibilities, made it eminently desirable to open the fullest communication with Russia through Persia. I was not without some anxiety about embarking on yet another new campaign in the Middle East but the arguments were compulsive. The Persian oilfields were the prime war factor, and if Russia were defeated, we would have

to be ready to occupy them ourselves. And then there was a threat to India. The suppression of the revolt in Iraq and the Anglo-French occupation of Syria, achieved as they were by narrow margins, had blotted out Hitler's oriental plan but if the Russians foundered he might try again." The strategic compulsion and the need for prophylactic action brought Persia within the purview of British operations and sealed her fate for the period of the war.

The Shah of Persia, Reza Shah, had high ambitions for the industrial development of his country and, for the achievement of that object, he turned to Germany for financial and technical assistance. A large number of German experts, engineers and technicians found their way into the country and were employed in industries and in operating the system of communications. Various estimates were made of the number of German nationals in Iran, which vary from a figure of 700 to more than 3,000. In 1941, it appears, there were between two to three thousand Germans in the country, some of whom were regarded by the British authorities as particularly dangerous to their interests. It was also apprehended that the Government was tending to grow pro-Axis and that the country had become the haunt of Nazi agents. The British attitude towards Iran was determined by considerations of safeguarding the supply of oil from that country and the security of communications, both for maintaining supplies to Russia and for preventing any hostile intrusion towards the Persian Gulf or in the direction of India. Iran held the key to the two routes leading to India, one from across the Caspian Sea by way of Meshed and Zahidan to the frontier of Baluchistan and the other through Teheran, Yezd, Kerman or along the Persian Gulf coast to the western borders of India. Subsequent to the declaration of war against Russia by Germany the fear was entertained that in case of the break-down of Russian defences in the south, the German army might burst through Iran by either of the two routes. It was also necessary that the Soviet Union should be kept into the war by despatching vital supplies to her, which was feasible only by using Iran as the channel of supply. Iran was scarcely in a position to deny the route. This inability to resist the Allied demands had led to the feelings in certain quarters in Iran that arrangements might be made with the British for the use of railways rather than offer any resistance. There was little enthusiasm for any policy of opposition to the British in the country. Military weakness and economic difficulties had been largely responsible for such a feeling. The Government of the Shah also, it appears, was not intractable to some accommodation with the Allied Powers. After the easy surrender of Iraq and the demolition of opposition in Syria, it was unlikely that any German

assistance could flow into Persia at that moment, particularly as Hitler was seriously involved in the Russian affair. Therefore the Iranian Government was in no position, and would certainly be not in a mood as well, to oppose reasonable British demands. It was, however, this very weakness of the Iranian Government which made the Allied demand so persistent and their attitude rigid.

The British Minister at Teheran had particular objection to the stay of three Germans in the country, and he did not favour Germans working in arms factories and on the railways. Therefore he pressed the Iranian Government to adopt necessary measures for expelling some of the Germans and stopping their activities in the country. On 1 July 1941, he asked for the immobilisation of German ships at Bandar Shahpur. He also demanded the expulsion of four-fifths of the Germans from the country immediately; and naturally the Iranian Government could not satisfy the British Minister. Meanwhile the Government of India had felt particularly concerned about the political situation in Iran as the external defence of India was bound up with the security of that country. India had to maintain the bulk of the troops in this region and therefore was keen to maintain the integrity of the Persian Gulf line of communication. The Government of India was, therefore, insisting on the Government of the United Kingdom to take strong measures for expelling German agents and eliminating German influence from that country. On 9 July 1941, the Governor-General wrote to the Secretary of State for India, "In our view positive policy to secure elimination of enemy centres in Iran is a matter of most vital importance." This was followed next week by a strong protest "against the apparent failure in spite of an assurance given even to take into account our considered representations regarding policy in a country where we are most directly interested and from which most dangerous threat to India's security may develop." This was further followed on 20 July by the statement that, "We do not believe that general public of Iran whose sentiments of national loyalty are still ill developed would long sustain deprivation of items such as sugar, tea, piece goods, and cheap bazar articles, particularly if they could be made to understand that restoration of supplies depended solely on expulsion of German technicians and tourists." The Government of India persisted and determined the British policy of pressing for the expulsion of Germans from the country. The Iranian Prime Minister was not quite prepared to submit to this demand as he felt it to be contrary to the Iranian treaty with Germany and their policy of neutrality. He considered such demands as prejudicial to sovereignty of the country, and he assured the British of his vigilance in the matter of preventing

Germans from resorting to undesirable activities. To the various demands of the British Minister, the Iranian Prime Minister continued to repeat the assurance that he would do everything for their satisfaction. But the Ambassador was not satisfied with the measures which he felt were inadequate. It appears the Government of Iran was keen to adopt a cautious policy which might be in conformity with her attitude of neutrality and rights of a sovereign state. But the British Government had no patience. The steps taken up to the middle of July had been regarded by the British Government as liable to remove the threat of serious trouble. The Secretary of State for India had informed the Governor-General of these measures, but the Government of India was not satisfied and was highly critical of the complacent attitude of the British Ambassador and His Majesty's Government.

The British Government was contemplating applying of pressure on Iran with Soviet co-operation so as to lead to the expulsion of the hostile nations. The General Officer Commanding British and Indian troops in Iraq had been asked to be in a state of readiness to secure the oil refinery at Abadan and to occupy the oilfields of Naft-i-Shah and Khuzistan. The British Government had approved the plan to exert joint Anglo-Soviet pressure on the Iranian Government which might be backed by show of force. A plan of operations was also drawn up which was aimed at simultaneous action in the south-western and western part of the country, in the areas of the oilfields. On 17 August a memorandum was presented to the Government of Iran in which a reduction of 80 per cent of German population was demanded, which was to be effected before the end of the month. The replies of the Iranian Government, which were given simultaneously to the British and Soviet Ambassadors, reiterated the sentiments regarding the rights of the neutrals, and therefore it did not meet with the wishes of the Allies. Thereupon joint British and Soviet notes were presented simultaneously with a joint military action which started on 25 August. In their note they had mentioned that, influenced by the Iranian Government's inability "to give adequate satisfaction to their joint recommendations", the two Governments had decided "to have recourse to other measures to safeguard their essential interests; these measures would in no way be directed against the Iranian people and the independence and territorial integrity of Iran but solely against the attempts of the Axis Powers to establish their control on Iran."

With this began the short campaign of pressing the Iranians to submit to the will of the British and Soviet Governments. This joint military campaign was, according to them, actuated by the necessity of purging Iran of German influence. The main object

was that of exerting pressure which succeeded to the fullest extent. The surprise attack by the troops of the 8th Indian Division in two sectors broke the feeble resistance, whenever it was offered, of the Iranian forces. The entry of the Indian troops into Iran from Khanaqin and Basra was accompanied by a simultaneous advance of Russian troops into the country. The Russian and the Indian forces met at Senneh and from there they moved to Kazvin. The entry of the Allied troops had not made any radical change in the life of the civilian population of the country. Meanwhile the Prime Minister had resigned and his successor accepted the terms which were offered by the two Allies. These included the closing of the Axis Legations and expulsion of Germans from Iran who were to be handed over to the Allies. But before the terms were complied with by the Iranian Government, the Russian forces moved towards Teheran, which induced the Shah to abdicate on 16 September. As a consequence Mohammed Reza Pehlvi succeeded to the throne and the new regime co-operated fully with the Allies, not only in the expulsion of Axis personnel but also in the fullest utilisation of the Iranian facilities and exploitation of its economy for the purposes of conducting the Allied war. Iran was thereafter used for organising aid to Russia which became the major responsibility of the forces, Indian and British, which were stationed in Iraq and Iran.

Within a short time of the commencement of Rashid Ali's revolt in Iraq, a large Indian force had been brought to Western Asia and the states of Iraq and Iran had been subdued and brought under British military occupation. The Government of India had sent three divisions in 1941 to Iraq besides the divisions which were operating in North and East Africa. The main function of this force, after the cessation of local hostility in Iraq and Iran, was to organise the area for counteracting any further German moves into that region. With the commencement of German hostilities against the Soviet Union in June 1941, and the subsequent rapid drive of the Nazi forces into the southern part of Russia leading towards the Caucasus, began the danger of German invasion of Iraq and Iran, to counteract which plans were formulated, and forces were organised for the defence of Western Asia and the Persian Gulf region. The next step after the occupation of Iraq and Iran was therefore to organise the defence of these territories against German infiltration from the north, west or east. The armed forces in the area were, therefore, first organised under the Tenth Army, which was now formed, and later a new command, known as Persia and Iraq Command, was formed to organise defence and supervise the movement of supplies to Russia from the Persian Gulf ports. The Indian contribution to the Tenth Army and later the Persia and Iraq Com-

mand was the despatch of the 6th, 8th and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions and the 31st Indian Armoured Division, but the defence plans were based on the presence of ten divisions of army and 30 squadrons of the Royal Air Force for employment in Iraq and another 4 to 6 divisions in Iran. Till the close of the year 1942 the danger of German invasion of Iran or Iraq formed the basis of various appreciations which led to the formulation of plans of defence. However, the Russian resistance did not crumble and the Germans were never in a position to direct their attention to Iran or Iraq. By the beginning of 1943 the danger from this direction had almost disappeared. None the less, during this period the India Command was engaged on examining the direction and magnitude of the threat and prepared defence plans both for the protection of the immediate frontiers of India and for securing the outer defence, the axis of which lay in Iraq and Iran. Owing to the war situation in Europe and the Middle East, the Government of India was naturally apprehensive of threat to the frontiers of India and, therefore, was keen to take measures of external defence. It is in this context that India took interest in the Middle East and was preoccupied with the developments in Iraq and Iran.

Germany invaded Russia at the end of June destroying a large part of the Soviet air force near the frontiers. Hitler had thrown in 150 divisions, of which 20 were armoured, besides the Roumanian and Finnish troops, into the task of penetrating Russia from three sides—the north, the south and the centre—and destroying the Communist state. The Russians opposed the invasion with a force of 180 divisions and 55 tank brigades, of which nearly 158 divisions were in the frontier region. But the Germans had a better armament and had experience of many battles in western and south-eastern Europe behind them. In the initial stages the attack was driven home with great vigour so that within a few weeks the German armies had reached Kiev in the south and were advancing towards Rostov on their way to strike the Caucasus region, rich in oil resources. In the north they were investing Leningrad and in the centre also they were not very far from Moscow. Hitler laid greater emphasis on the southern thrust ostensibly with the object of gaining possession of the rich oil-bearing area, may be for enveloping the Russian forces from the south and the east and thus dealing a decisive blow from the rear against the political centre of the Soviet Union. These early successes, and more particularly the southern drive together with the general feeling that the Russians might not be able to resist the invasion for long, led to apprehension of German threat to Iraq and Iran as also of an ultimate advance towards the Indian frontier. Churchill has mentioned that, "Almost all responsible military opinion held that the Russian armies would

soon be defeated and largely destroyed". In the early stages of the war with Russia, it was difficult for the western world to imagine that the Russians would succeed in crushing Nazi Germany. There was little recognition of the strength "of the Soviet Government, the fortitude of the Russian people, their immeasurable reserves of manpower, the vast size of the country, the rigours of the Russian winter," and, therefore, not till very late could there be any prospect of Russian success. There was fear "that the Caucasus mountains would be traversed and the basin of the Caspian dominated by German forces". This led to the organising of defence schemes for protecting the Middle East from being overrun by the Germans. The India Command in this situation vigorously adopted planning for defence in two sectors : one, near the frontier of India and the other in Iraq and Iran. In the latter planning it was assisted by the Iraq Command and later by the Persia and Iraq Command. India had been given the responsibility for the defence of Iran, Iraq and Syria theatre. Her interest in this region was primary and, therefore, for nearly two years, according to the changes in the character of war, plans for defence of this region were prepared as this area was considered to be the first line of defence of India against any hostile incursions.

Soon after the expulsion of Rashid Ali from Iraq, General Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief of India, reviewed the situation in the Middle East and assessed the part which India might be called upon to play there. German successes in North Africa and Greece had, in his view, increased the threat to Turkey, Syria and Palestine. He feared that Syria might easily fall into German hands which would give them, with their superiority in the air, the means of encircling Turkey, and striking at Egypt from the north as well as to move against Iraq to deny to the British the use of Basra and the lines of communication leading from there to Turkey and Egypt. He also apprehended the cutting off of oil supplies and the creation of disaffection among the Muslims in India. In that eventuality his solution was that hold over Palestine must be retained, and the Germans should be prevented from establishing themselves firmly in Syria. This would deter Turkey from joining the Axis and would deny to the Germans access to Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gulf and India. He laid great stress on using Basra as the port of entry for maintaining the forces in Egypt and Western Asia. Therefore, Basra had, in his estimate, assumed a major strategic importance. He also emphasised the need for consolidating British hold in Iraq and developing the communications leading through that country. In this calculation Iraq had a definite strategic importance, the security of which was imperative both in the interest of the protection of India and the integrity of

the British Empire. The General Staff in India laid great stress on the strategic importance of the Middle East for the defence of India, and a force of three divisions was being prepared in the country for the defence of that area.

Up to the time that the Soviet Union became a major theatre of Axis hostility, the appreciations for defence of Iran and Iraq were based on the possibility of Soviet advance through Caucasus-Caspian region. With the entry of Russia into the war that threat was removed, but a greater danger of German invasion from the north was considered as imminent. By the month of August 1941 the Germans had made the whole of the Balkans subject to their will. The British resistance in Greece and Crete had failed. In Northern Africa also the position was none too strong as the German forces were hammering almost at the gates of Egypt. The war in Russia was tending in favour of the Germans as they had rolled back the Russian forces up to the river Don and into Caucasia. This created a new and serious danger for the security of Iran, Iraq and Syria. In this situation the General Staff in India appreciated that the Russian resistance could not long endure and with the crumbling of the Russian front the Germans might move into the Middle East from the direction of Caucasia or Turkey. The fear of German infiltration in strength into northern Iran and Iraq had considerably increased. There was no certainty in that case about the attitude of Turkey which might either consent to German infiltration or, if she offered resistance, could not maintain herself long and would succumb to the German invasion. The General Staff appreciation was that Germans might adopt any one or all the three routes for their move eastwards. These were : (i) through Egypt, Palestine and Syria into Iraq, (ii) through the Black Sea coast and Turkey into Iraq, and (iii) through Caucasia or trans-Caspia into northern Iran and from there to Iraq or south Iran. This danger continued in all its intensity for more than a year till Russian resistance had consolidated itself and the Germans had been thrown back in Northern Africa. During this period the problem of the defence of Syria, Iraq, and Iran was taken up in earnest and plans were made in which India had a prominent role. The area comprised by Iraq and Iran was regarded as the region of the advanced defence of north-western India, for it was likely that in case Iraq and Iran succumbed to German influence the air-fields in that region, as also the ports on the Persian Gulf, might be held by the Germans which would menace the security of India. The defence of Syria, Iraq and Iran was, therefore, regarded as a phase of the external defence of India. From this point of view the plans for the defence of Iraq and Iran were important for India.



The appreciations and plans made at the time discussed primarily the defence of Iraq against German invasion which might come either from the direction of Anatolia or by way of Azerbaijan and Iran or from both the directions simultaneously. General Wavell discussed both these routes in his note of 29 September 1941. Other appreciations also took cognizance of German advance from these two directions. Turkey and northern Iran, from Caucasia to the south-east of Caspian Sea, were the possible lines of German advance which might lead in the direction of the Persian Gulf. At the same time German infiltration through Turkey towards Syria and Palestine would create a pincer movement for throttling the British forces in Northern Africa. Thus the large sector from Alexandretta, on the Mediterranean, through Teheran, Ahwaz and Iran became the region the defence of which had to be provided for. The central fortress of this area was Iraq which contained the Abadan area where was concentrated the oil producing region. In the plans which were formulated at this time the defence of this wide area was conceived in concentric lines with the centre defended in depth on the method of a chain of fortresses.

We may first consider the plans relating to the route which lay through Turkey. The German advance was presumed to lie through western or eastern Anatolia directed on the one hand towards Syria and Palestine and on the other towards Iraq. The maintenance of the integrity of Turkey was essential in any scheme of defence in the event of German invasion from that side. In case, however, Turkish co-operation was not available the plan contemplated holding the German advance as far ahead of the borders of Syria in the Turkish territories as practicable. The plan, as contained in the Operation Instruction of 9 September 1941, prescribed occupation of the defiles in the southern Anatolian mountains with the object of stopping the German forces in a terrain inhospitable for armoured action. Also forward defence lines were to be prepared at the foothills where alone effective defence might be organised. Defences were to be constructed, and the estimate of the force was one Army and two Corps Headquarters comprising two armoured divisions and six infantry divisions, exclusive of Free French formations. Demolition was an important part of the plan made at the time.

In addition to the threat to Syria the danger of invasion of northern Iraq and northern Iran was also not ignored. Its possible direction could be through either Caucasus or Turkey or both simultaneously. Regarding the danger from the Turkish side the General Staff, in their appreciation of 10 September 1941, held that Turkish resistance would not last long and that the German

move towards Iraq would be rapid. To counteract it their plan was to move forward and hold a line in the mountains so as to block the main communications southwards. This forward line was proposed to be that of Bitlis, Mush, Kharput, Malatya, which offered suitable scope for resistance as the right flank lay on Lekvan. This was to be the forward zone behind which positions were to be defended in northern Iraq. One of such centres of defence was to be Mosul. The defences there were to be organised in three divisional areas around the city. Each of these defensive areas was to include operational aerodromes and was to be constructed for all-round defence, well stocked with supplies for 60 days. This central defence in northern Iraq was to be joined with the Syrian defence in the west and the Russian defence system towards north-east. A force of one armoured division and a heavy armoured brigade was to be located in the vicinity of Mosul. In case of the collapse of Russian opposition, the General Staff view was that Tabriz must be held with an additional force of one infantry and one armoured division, so that the Germans might be held across the Iranian frontier and prevented from establishing aerodromes in northern Iran. This was to be the outer line of defence.

In addition to the outer defences, a defensive system was contemplated for Baghdad area also which was to be linked up with the Russian system of defence in the Kermanshah-Hamadan area. Two infantry divisions and an armoured force would be required for being established there. The principles on which this defence was to be organised were laid down by the General staff as follows :

“As our object must be to delay and break up the enemy attack as far away as possible from our defences and as the enemy has difficult country to traverse with limited communications, our operational aerodromes must be organised in depth and must be placed as far forward as possible”. This forward area would be north of Mosul where hostile aerodromes would not be permitted to be located.”

“(2) The frontages to be defended in Iraq preclude the adoption of any linear system of defence. . . . The whole defensive system must therefore be based on areas organised for all-round defence which, even if by-passed by enemy, can still exert effective pressure owing to the armoured forces and air forces which they contain. Having regard to the necessity for depth it appears that defensive areas should be organised approximately about Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. . . . . This system of defence entails defended areas being entirely self-supporting.”

“(3) Any other system of defence can only be less effective and would inevitably lead to withdrawal. In these circumstances we should no longer be able to protect adequately our bases at Basra or the Anglo-Iranian oilfields, or to guarantee the security of the Persian railways. Under such conditions it would be necessary to consider whether our object still remained the defence of Northern Iraq and Northern Persia or had been reduced to that of the defence of India itself.”

“(4) The whole defensive system will be based on the static defence of certain vital areas as self-contained fortresses and comprising all arms, the attack of any enemy forces infiltrating between those areas by air forces located within the areas themselves and by armoured and motorised forces from the defended areas or from areas further in rear.”

In this scheme of defence the chief object was to provide protection to Basra and the oilfields area. To prevent infiltration there a depth in defence was required. The system of fortresses or defended areas, honeycombed within the main region of defence was to be adopted so that a hostile force might be met outside the perimeter, and, even if it infiltrated within, it might be easily liquidated by thinning its line of communication and by dealing with it by concentrated attack by air and armoured forces. In this scheme it was essential that the main routes of advance were denied to the hostile forces and for this recourse might be had to demolitions or inundations. Light mobile forces supported by artillery would be employed in forward regions to harass the invading forces. These concentric lines of defence in the outer sector and near Baghdad were to be organised ultimately for the defence of Basra-Abadan area which was to be defended ultimately.

This scheme was finally accepted by General Wavell on 23 October 1941. He decided to construct defensive positions which were to be :

- (i) between river Tigris and hills at Faida, south of Dohuk and bridgehead on west bank of river at Mosul and another bridgehead 50 miles south in Qaiyara area. Outpost positions at Faish Khabur-Zakho and at Aski Mosul were also to be constructed;
- (ii) all approaches to Baghdad were further to be blocked between the two rivers, mainly by inundations. General Wavell's estimate was that for this defence one armoured division, one heavy armoured brigade and six infantry divisions were required which would be provided by India by the month of April 1942.

The plan for the defence of Iraq, Syria and northern Persia had taken into account the fullest co-operation between the Russian forces in northern Iraq, Iran and Caucasia and the British-Indian forces in Iraq and Syria. The basic principle contained in this plan was that the Germans should be opposed in western or southern Anatolia. In case this line was untenable the invading forces were to be opposed on the frontiers of Iraq or Syria where defended positions in considerable depth would be prepared. In this scheme of defence the system of lineal defence, which was in vogue at the beginning of the war and had been found to be utterly useless, had been abandoned in favour of the fortress system of defence in depth. Both the Middle East and the India Commands had resorted to this new system which was to be adopted to provide effective protection to the Basra-Abadan-Persian Gulf region as also for the frontiers of India.

In the plans discussed in 1941, the attention was largely concentrated on the defence of Iraq which alone was vulnerable at the moment to German attacks. The German forces had full control of the Balkans and had penetrated eastwards as far as Rostov but had failed to dominate the Caucasus or the Caspian regions. As such, danger to northern Iran from the eastern side or even to Azerbaijan was not imminent or serious. But in the summer of 1942 the threat to northern Persia could not be discounted for long. The German advance eastwards had been rapidly moving into the Caucasus region, and the collapse of the southern front of Russia seemed to be imminent. The odds against Russia were mounting. In that situation the danger of the German forces advancing through north-eastern Persia and reaching the oilfields was not believed to be remote. This involved the necessity of opposing the Germans in north Persia so as to prevent them from entering Iraq plains where the British-Indian forces were weak in the armoured arm. A scheme of reinforcements was put forth so as to provide for the security of Persia in 1942-43. In the Chiefs of Staff appreciation, Basra-Abadan area was invested with greater importance than the security of Egypt, for it was rightly felt that if the Persian Gulf region were lost the position in Egypt would become untenable. The defence of the sources of oil and sea transport of the Middle East had become vitally important not only for the defence of Egypt but also for the security of India. The threat being acute in the winter of 1942 and the spring of 1943, the Chiefs of Staff were prepared to assign increasing forces for the protection of that area.

In the appreciations at this time the German advance in trans-Caspia through Baku was regarded as a probability. A simultaneous advance from Baku along with a thrust westwards, through Julfa

and Tabriz, was deemed probable. Moreover, advance from Baku, Rusht, Kazvin and Teheran or Kazvin, Hamadan or Hamadan, Ahwaz was likely to develop. However, both these threats might not develop before the winter of 1942 or the spring of 1943. In the Operation Instruction of 20 November 1942, preparations for the campaign in 1943 were outlined. Forces were to be concentrated on the Araxes, and two divisions were to advance to north Persia while five divisions might be concentrated in the area Ardebil-Tabriz. This plan for the concentration of the Tenth Army in the Iranian region was known as Gherkin. The troops were to be disposed in three lines so as to contain the hostile army in some depth. By this means the German infiltration towards the southern Iranian oilfields was to be prevented, so also the plan was intended to stop any German break-through towards the frontiers of India.

However, the Russian resistance did not collapse, and by the beginning of 1943 the German forces had been thrown back. In North Africa also the Germans had met with a setback. These developments had minimised the danger to the Middle East and, beyond maintaining troops in Iraq and Iran for the purpose of mounting supplies to Russia, the Indian force was not called upon to oppose any German incursion into the Middle East which was then the outer line of defence for India.

At the same time as the Indian army was engaged in eliminating Axis threat in the Middle East, the India Command was busily developing plans for the defence of the north-western frontier of India which, throughout 1941, was not considered to be free from external menace. It has been mentioned earlier that, as a result of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the danger of a Russian invasion through Afghanistan was assessed as a probability. This led to the formulation of the Plan A of 1940. Static defences were constructed in the Khyber area and, as usual, the troops for the defence of the frontier were disposed in the north-western region of India. Till the middle of 1941 the whole basis of the defence planning of India was the likelihood of the Russian threat developing from the north-western side from across the Hindu Kush. In the early months of the war, as long as Russia had not been invaded by the Germans, the gravity of Nazi incursion eastwards was not realised. The main concentration then was on maintaining the integrity of the defence of Egypt and Palestine and supporting Turkey to remain free from German influence. It is only when the Germans had controlled the Balkans and later when in their war with Russia their advance eastwards along the Black Sea had become a reality, that imminence of threat to the Indian frontiers was realised. At the end of 1940 the danger of

Soviet aggression had become a thing of the past and, with Soviet Russia becoming a victim of Nazi aggression, the problem of contemplating Soviet hostility to India, which had engaged the attention of the General Staff in India for nearly a century, was no longer an active issue. But this did not afford a respite to the General Staff because the presence of German and Italian nationals in Afghanistan, and the Axis propaganda in Kabul created a new danger which appeared to be looming large in the north-western horizon. On 5 June, the Secretary of State for India asked for the views of the Government of India for removing the threat of the presence of hostile aliens in Afghanistan and Iran. The Chiefs of Staff in India examined this problem and, in their review of the strategical situation, they emphasised the unity of the front from Syria to Sinkiang and assessed the danger which might accrue from the possible penetration of Iran and Afghanistan by German forces. Their conclusion was that such intrusion at any point of the protective armour of India would be dangerous to her security. Afghanistan and Iran were two areas of vital concern to India and the main problem was how to prevent German infiltration there. The appreciation of Chiefs of Staff was that the German progress in the Caucasus would be rapid and in that event there was certainty of Afghanistan and Iran growing hostile to the British which would enable the German forces to move far and fast through these lands. Therefore it was necessary that all measures should be taken to prevent easy German passage through these countries. This involved Germans being expelled from the two countries. The action against Iran was one of the consequences of this thinking.

The Government of India had taken cognizance of the situation as it had developed up to the end of 1940 and had framed a plan for defence which is known as the 1941 Defence of India Plan. This was communicated to the Secretary of State on 29 March 1941. It was a comprehensive plan which included the coastal defence, internal security, defence of north-east and the defence of north-west India. It was based on the traditional fear of Russian invasion, but the new thinking was that Russia could not act alone except in collaboration with Germany. The plan laid conventional emphasis on the northern portion of the north-western frontier. The whole plan was essentially a defensive one and was related to the 1940 Plan which had contemplated construction of static defences in the frontier area. The new plan laid stress on the expeditious completion of such static defences which might be used as pivots of manoeuvre on which to fight the defensive battle. The plan was divided into two stages, one purely defensive and the other of advancing into Afghanistan. But the second stage was not seriously intended as it could not be imple-

mented without the availability of equipment from the United Kingdom for the mobile forces. This plan might be implemented only when five infantry and two armoured divisions and one heavy armoured brigade were available. This force was to be additional to the existing Frontier Defence and Frontier Defence Reserve Troops. A complement of 17 squadrons of air force was also required for this plan. The 1941 Plan had for its object the provision of suitable defences to withstand an attack by armoured forces supported by air force and followed by land force against the north-western frontier. The purpose was to design the defences in such a way as to enable a hostile attack being defeated beyond or as near the frontier as possible and localise any break-through that might occur. The scale of attack was calculated at two armoured divisions, two infantry divisions and a brigade of air-borne troops. The area of assembly was to be either the north of the Oxus or in northern Iran. On the basis of this plan, the Northern Command and the Western Independent District were asked in June 1941 to prepare detailed plans for blocking the main approaches in their respective areas. In the Northern Command defences were to be constructed in the Khyber and the Kurram and the Waziristan regions. Major emphasis was laid on the Kurram and Khyber routes which must be controlled by the Indian Army.

With the entry of Russia into the war the danger of attack from the northern side was practically eliminated. The new appreciation, therefore, was that the brunt of the Axis attack would be borne by the Western Independent District, and henceforth greater attention was paid to the defence of the western frontier. Therefore policy in the years 1941 and 1942 was largely directed towards this sector. In 1941, initially, the direction from which the Germans could endanger the security of India was the eastern Mediterranean area. But the action taken under the initiative of the Government of India in Iraq and Iran, from April to September 1941, considerably relieved the situation and minimised the threat of a German break-through from that direction. By this manoeuvre of force the danger of invasion from the western side had been greatly reduced, but the advance of the German forces into the Caucasus region and the swaying fortunes of the war in the African desert did not completely eliminate the fear. The route from the Caucasus and northern Iran towards the frontiers of India was still unguarded and fear was entertained that a German invasion might occur from that quarter. The plans for defence prepared in India in 1941 and 1942 were mainly directed to the removal of the possible threat by this route. In the appreciations of that time, Meshed was regarded as the starting-point for the German invasion towards the north-western frontier of India. Two routes lay from Meshed, one towards Herat and Farah, and the other

towards Zahidan. From Farah many routes lay to the Indian frontier through Kandahar, as also along the Helmand towards Baluchistan. In this region of Farah to Baluchistan, armoured forces could move with facility. In their appreciation the Western Independent District assessed that the main thrust would be directed on the Quetta-Bolan area which was an important base for defensive operations. Three routes lay to the Quetta-Bolan area, but it was rightly assessed by the India Command that a threat of this nature would be possible only when Russia had been eliminated and the British position in Iraq and Iran had completely collapsed. Later when Japan entered the war, the appreciation was that the Germans might attempt some action combined with their eastern ally to embarrass the British position in India. The course of action envisaged in that situation was that the Germans might establish their air forces in Iran to threaten the British sea communications in the Persian Gulf as also the bases in north-western India and the port of Karachi and the shipping in the Arabian Sea. Also they might occupy Baluchistan as a base for further operations. The area to the west of Baluchistan provided a number of aerodromes and afforded facility for the construction of others. In such an eventuality the area which would be most affected was the Baluchistan-Sind area. Therefore the General Staff gave directions to the Western Independent District that modern defences be constructed to the south of Fort Sandeman. The main approaches to Baluchistan by the armoured forces were to be blocked, and defences designed to protect the flanks should also be prepared in depth so as to localise a breakthrough and to enable the situation to be established for a counter-attack. The infantry which would man these obstacles would be provided with all-round field defences which were to be constructed simultaneously. Defence of the Indus bridges was also to be arranged. The Western District prepared this plan in October 1941 which was accepted by the General Staff, and constructions were authorised accordingly. In this plan the general policy was that hostile forces should be met and opposed by the mobile armoured forces beyond the frontier. But owing to the insufficiency of the armoured force static defences were to be provided to act in an auxiliary role. The Western District plan provided for these static defences which were conceived in three concentric lines styled as Outer Defences, Inner Defences and the Defences of the Bases. The Outer Defences were planned both on the Kandahar-Chaman-Quetta and Nokundi-Nushki-Quetta lines. On the former, fortresses organised for all-round defence and capable of withstanding 30 days' siege were to be constructed along the Khwaja Amran range. On the Nushki line fortresses were to be constructed in the Galangur area which would deny access to the armoured forces in the direction of Kalat and prevent any direct thrust against Quetta on the main route. In case the outer defence was pierced



through, the inner defences were provided which would block further advance towards Quetta. In this sector the static defences were to be provided. In addition to the static defences, one armoured division was also to be allotted to the Western District whose role was to destroy the hostile armoured forces forward of the static defences.

In the course of the year 1941 the details of the plan were worked out and construction of static defences was taken in hand. But before any effective action was taken, the General Staff felt that the situation governing the 1941 Plan had altered and fresh planning was essential. On 8 April 1942, the General Staff asked for revision of the plan in view of the probability of combined German-Japanese attack from the west and east, respectively. In their view the plan for the defence of Baluchistan would involve re-examination; hence the whole planning was taken up afresh in 1942. The Joint Planning Staff, in May 1942, assessed the regions of danger as the Persian Gulf, Baluchistan and Afghanistan. To prevent a threat to these it was necessary that the Germans should not gain use of aerodromes within effective bombing range of bases in north-west India and the port of Karachi, and that they should be prevented from establishing their forces in the Quetta plain. Their appreciation further was that the Germans would be able to use against Baluchistan two armoured divisions, three motorised divisions and one airborne division with an additional division for the other areas of the north-west frontier. They might also be able to mobilise nearly 500 aircraft. In the view of the Joint Planning Staff, the Germans might capture aerodromes in the Kandahar-Farah area in Afghanistan and the aerodromes in east Iran. The primary aim of defence would, therefore, be to deny the use of this area to the Germans. It was suggested that the aerodromes should be utilised by the Indian Air Force and also a mobile force might be maintained there. As against the land advance into Baluchistan resistance should be offered in the Khwaja Amran-Nushki area, the failure to hold which would endanger maintenance of hold over Quetta. In that eventuality the only course was that of demolitions. In case the Zhob was turned the forces would withdraw to Fort Munro. In the northern sector of Khyber, Kurram, Waziristan, the appreciation envisaged Afghanistan being under Axis domination and a large-scale tribal rising. The attack was likely in the neighbourhood of the Khyber and Thal. This might be opposed by air action and hard-hitting mobile columns. But simultaneously with the threat to Baluchistan it was unlikely for the Indian forces to be able to offer effective resistance in the northern front. In that case, with the fixed defences in the Khyber, the Khyber Pass must be defended. However, in the worst case it might be necessary to evacuate forward areas. and Khyber, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan line

might be held which would be the last stand. There was to be provision for demolitions particularly of the Indus bridges. A list of vulnerable points was also prepared and detailed lay-outs were planned for them. These plans for defence in 1941 and 1942 had contemplated the worst situation of the German forces intruding into India from the side of Afghanistan and Baluchistan at a time when the Japanese were engaged in an invasion from the eastern side. The defeat of the Russians and the collapse of British strength in the Middle East had also been assumed as the basis for planning. In view of these estimates the plans were necessarily of a defeatist character and involved demolitions etc. to delay the advance of the hostile forces. However, such a situation did not arise and, by the end of 1942, the position in the western theatre had slightly bettered, and the Germans were so closely involved in Russia that they could not contemplate any advance eastwards to act in collaboration with their eastern ally. The danger to India thus did not materialise.

This planning for defence, both on the inner line as well as the outer line in Iraq and Iran, together with the demand for troops to fight the Italians and Germans in the Middle East, had led to considerable expansion of the Indian armed forces. The defence plans necessitated the formulation of plans for the expansion of the army. Consequently, in 1940 and 1941, the Indian armed forces were expanded and comprehensive endeavours were made to equip them.

## CHAPTER VI

# The Threat from the East

Germany, Japan and Italy had formed the Axis. But when the war began in 1939, only Germany had joined it, the other two remaining neutral in its initial stages. Not long after, Italy also became involved; but Japan maintained her neutrality even longer. This was largely due to the fact that Japan was engaged in war with China whose resistance in spite of her weakness held out, and the eastern Axis partner did not have the resources to finish off the China incident and also undertake a war with the United Kingdom and the United States which, it was inevitable, must join in case of hostilities opening in the Pacific Ocean. It was not at that time in her interest to disperse her energies and resources, and therefore Japan kept aloof from the European war. All that she chose to do was to advise the United Kingdom to withdraw her forces from Tientsin and other parts of China where they might be brought into conflict with the Japanese armed forces.

But this position was unlikely to continue for long. From the beginning of the century it was clear that Japan would not be content with her island kingdom and that she must expand to survive as a Great Power. The occupation of Korea and Formosa was but a prelude to further ambitions of continental expansion. The decaying Manchu Empire and the chaos which came with the Revolution, under the succeeding governments, provided a golden opportunity for Japan to enrich herself by the spoliation of China. When Europe was engaged in the grim struggle in 1915, Japan presented her Twenty-one Demands on China which was a clear indication of her intention to impose a mortgage on the Chinese Republic. She did not succeed in her game largely because of the intervention of the United States of America. But when the peace came Japan did gain certain territorial advantages though not in full accordance with her aspirations. Her move against China during the Great War, as also the earlier events in the nineteenth century, made it quite evident that she would not rest content unless she had acquired a stable and permanent foothold on the Chinese mainland. On the other hand, it was quite apparent that in this manoeuvre Japan would meet with the definite and determined opposition from the United States.

While in the second half of the nineteenth century England, France and Russia primarily were interested in the Chinese empire,

in gaining territories and obtaining economic concessions, in the twentieth century the United States and Japan were the main Powers having close interest in the decaying Manchu Empire. The United States was anxious to have a free hand in the expansion of her economic interests, and for that purpose was keen to prevent political domination over China by any Power, whether Russia or Japan. Her Open Door Policy was leading definitely to the financial support and economic development of the Chinese empire. It was also leading her to the naval control of the Pacific Ocean and establishment of naval bases in the south-western Pacific. Philippines had been acquired and the United States was unwilling to see any serious naval rival in the Pacific waters. These aspirations of the United States brought her into conflict with Japanese interests which were, as mentioned earlier, essentially of territorial and economic expansion on the mainland. Japan had an eye on Manchuria which she coveted both as a hinterland to her Korean possessions as also as a field to provide her with the raw materials for industries and food for her teeming millions. She was also eager to afford protection to her island kingdom and therefore could not view with indifference the establishment of any rival influence on the Chinese coastline. She was apprehensive of American dominion over the Philippines and regarded herself unsafe in the Pacific as long as the American navy was strong and the United States had bases in western Pacific.

The end of the Great War, however, did not find Japan strong enough to pursue her ambitious projects. Meanwhile the United States was anxious to maintain her naval security in the Pacific as well as establish her new position as a predominant Power in the world. She called a conference in Washington in the year 1921 with the purpose of maintaining general peace and reducing competition in armaments. The Washington Conference was attended by the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Italy and Japan and ended with the signing of a treaty, known as the Washington Treaty of 1922, which prescribed the limits of the navies of the various Powers. Japan had asked for parity with Great Britain and United States but failed to obtain it. Instead her navy was to be in the proportion of 3 to 5 of the two great Western Powers. This was a definite climb-down for Japan and contrary to her growing position in the Far East. But she had to accept this humiliation because of her economic weakness. However, she had the satisfaction of covenanting that Great Britain and United States would not establish any new fortifications or naval bases beyond what they had in the Pacific, and she had gained the mandate over some strategic islands in the Central Pacific. This Washington Naval Treaty had been imposed on her by the two Western Powers, largely with a view to prevent her from establishing advanced naval and air bases in the Pacific and thereby to

curb her aggressive intentions. The Naval Treaty was followed by two other treaties, the Four Power Treaty and the Nine Power Treaty, which, specially the latter, aimed at safeguarding the integrity of China and maintaining the *status quo* in the Pacific. Japan had to relinquish her claims on the Shantung peninsula, and for the time she imposed a policy of self-restraint on herself in the matter of Chinese ambitions.

The third decade of the twentieth century was not propitious for the fulfilment of her aggressive designs for Japan. She had lost the traditional support of Great Britain which had abrogated the Anglo-Japanese alliance under American pressure. Japan was also faced with the opposition of the Soviet Union whose power was growing in East Asia. She was definitely exposed to the attack of the growing navy and economic superiority of the United States, which were slowly encircling her from both the sides in the Pacific. At the beginning of the fourth decade, thus, Japan encountered the problem of survival. Her position as a great industrial Power depended on finding adequate sources of supply of raw material and markets for her manufactured goods. She was deficient in iron, in petrol, and many other minerals, as also agricultural products like cotton and food for her population. The areas of South East Asia were already held by England, France or Holland, and without a successful war against these mighty Western Empires, there was no scope for any expansion for Japan in that quarter. The rising tariff walls were also gradually driving her out from these regions. She was dependent for her vital supplies on the United States and was at the mercy of the Western Empires for export of vital goods from their possessions in South East Asia. There was also the danger of China falling under Communist influence—a prospect which Japan feared most as that would have denied to her for ever the source of raw material in Manchuria and other parts of northern China.

It was in this predicament that Japan decided to occupy Manchuria after staging an incident at Mukden in 1931 and defying the League of Nations and the Western Powers which were unable to dislodge her from her new acquisitions. The Manchurian affair, however, made one thing clear, that Japan must meet with a determined opposition of the Western Powers and the United States in the realisation of her ambitions. About this time, the United Kingdom was definitely falling under the influence of the United States and was toeing the line of her ally of the Western Atlantic in the Far Eastern affairs. However, Japan, being opposed in the League of Nations, relinquished her membership of that body and, when time came, joined Germany and Italy making pacts with the Central European Powers in opposition to the United Kingdom. This was followed by her invasion of China

in the year 1937 which was in clear defiance of the wishes of the United Kingdom and the United States. Meanwhile, she had denounced the Washington Treaty which had considerably affected the strategic position in the Far East. In 1938 Japan had extended the war to South China and had occupied Canton which cut off the British colony of Hong Kong from the mainland. However, the Japanese had failed to crush the Chinese who had established the centre of their National Government at Chungking from where they organised opposition to the Japanese forces. The British and the Americans had been rendering support to the Chinese, and the Burma Road was one of the main arteries supplying war materials to Chiang Kai-shek. Indo-China under the French control, was also another avenue for such assistance. Thus, when the war came in 1939 Japan had failed to break the will of the Chinese forces to fight, which the Western Powers had been fortifying by their substantial support. Japan was uneasy at the presence of the British and American Fleets in, or in the neighbourhood of, the Pacific Ocean, and viewed not without apprehension the existence of their territories in her vicinity. Japan was eager to expand on the mainland, but in this she encountered opposition from the United States and the United Kingdom. She had joined the Axis of the Central European Powers and was doubtful of the intentions of the Soviet Union. It was in this situation that she had to decide her attitude towards the war in Europe.

When the war opened in Europe, Japan had nearly a million men in China engaged in breaking Chinese resistance, and in this process had advanced southwards controlling the entire coastal region and moving towards the French possession of Indo-China. Her main object at this time was to conclude the China Incident in her favour, and therefore she was content to leave the events to take their course in Europe as long as they did not prejudice her interests in the east. But the mounting tide of Nazi advance in Western Europe afforded a new stimulus to Japanese aggressive expansionist ambitions in South East Asia. German invasion of the Netherlands and the exile of the Dutch Government prompted a demand by the Japanese Government on the Netherlands East Indies for an assurance of a constant supply of oil, rubber, tin, bauxite and many raw materials in much larger quantities than before, irrespective of its altered situation, and under all circumstances in the future. No such assurances were extended, though it was stated reasonable demands might be entertained. Then followed the collapse of France, and this fact coupled with the elimination of Holland, and the dangerous plight of Great Britain, made even the moderates in Japan despair of the chances of success of the British, and whipped the desire of the army and the aggressive younger elements to adopt a forward policy and expand into South East Asia.

The Government was changed in Japan by the resignation of the Yonai Cabinet and installation of the Konoye Cabinet which included Matsuoka and Tojo as Foreign and Army Ministers, respectively. This new Cabinet adopted the programme of southern expansion, which policy was pursued for a year. The new Government placed two objectives before it, one was to bring about an immediate liquidation of their Chinese entanglement and the other was to obtain control of the economically rich South East Asia without war, for which purpose the project of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was adopted. To achieve these objects, Great Britain was asked to close the Burma Road, through which principally supplies were transported to the Chinese; vigorous demands were made on the Dutch for the supply of oil and other raw materials, and the French in Indo-China were compelled to afford to the Japanese control over the airfields and passage to the Japanese troops in the northern parts of the country. A measure of success was achieved. The Dutch, under British and American pressure, refused to yield the full demand for oil, but conceded to offer less than half of it for six months. The British also closed the Burma Road for three months. By the autumn of 1940, thus, the Japanese had, without entering the war, but having pacts with Germany and Italy, launched on a programme of eliminating European imperial interests from Asia and establishing instead their own control. The Tripartite Pact with her totalitarian friends of Europe had assigned to Japan "leadership in the establishment of a new order in the Far East" and brought the promise of their assistance in this mission.

The situation was quite tempting, and Hitler was keen that Japan should throw her weight into the scales so that the war in Europe might end in the defeat of the British. But the Japanese Government was not eager to enter the lists yet. Her northern frontier was exposed to Russian threat, and in the Pacific Ocean the danger of encountering the whole might of the United States was no less menacing. The British also had not yet fallen on their knees. Therefore, Japan did not immediately take to war but adopted diplomacy to achieve her object and clear the stage for military action when it might become necessary. In the next few months, the Japanese kept, in the words of Kirby, "four ends in view : to secure their Manchurian frontier with the Soviet Union, thus enabling them to move southwards without having to look over their shoulders; to obtain oil supplies and concessions from the Netherlands East Indies by means other than the use of force, thus making themselves less dependent on the United States. to obtain complete control of Indo-China, so as to be able to occupy, at an appropriate moment, Siamese territory as a base from which to mount an attack on Malaya, and to prevent the United States

either from entering the war on the side of Britain or interfering in their own plans for the southward advance.”<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese Government had at first made an unsuccessful approach to the Soviet Union through Hitler, who was keen that Japan should attack Singapore before or simultaneously with the German invasion of England, which Japan did not dare without a previous accord with the Soviet Union. A direct approach also did not succeed initially. However, ultimately in April 1941, Russia and Japan agreed to a Neutrality Pact for adhering to peaceful relations and respect for each other's territories. This Pact governed the relations between the two Powers till the end of the war, and brought security to both of them when they were involved in their grim struggles, one with Germany and the other with the Anglo-American Powers. The second object of compelling the Dutch East Indies to place their resources absolutely at the disposal of the Japanese did not succeed and Japan had to curtail her demands. But this failure to bend the Dutch, then under British and American influence, to their will stiffened the Japanese attitude and made them eager to bring Indo-China and Siam wholly within their possessions. It was a preliminary step to the war in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies for their conquest. The next activity in the spring of 1941 was therefore directed towards this end. The fall of France emboldened the Siamese Government to demand the return of border provinces from Indo-China, which had previously been annexed to it. Dispute soon assumed the form of a shooting war, in which Japan intervened as mediator, which role was accepted by the Siamese despite warnings by the United States, and a settlement was effected. This step was but the thin end of the wedge. The Japanese were keen to have comprehensive treaties with both the Powers so as to be able to obtain the Siamese rice crop and use Indo-China as their military and air base for operations in the region of South East Asia. Both Indo-China and Siam became subordinate zones operating to serve Japanese political, economic and military purposes. An important jumping-off place for the invasion of Malaya and the Dutch territories had thus been secured and the stage set for further operations.

These movements by Japan southwards and her adherence to the Tripartite Pact found repercussions in British, Dutch and American policies and their measures for defence. It was clear to the British Government that Japanese hostility in the east, without the countervailing advantage of the close military co-operation of the United States in the war, would be disastrous for their and Dutch Imperial interests. Therefore, while adopting measures for the defence of Malaya, the British were not prepared

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby, *The War against Japan Vol. I.*, p. 59.



to go to war with Japan unless the United States were drawn into it which was a major objective of Churchill's policy at this stage. American public opinion was not yet ready to side with the British against the Fascist Powers in Europe and required a major shock to manoeuvre in that direction. Japan might provide the occasion for the turn about face by threatening American security in the Pacific. Hence British policy was, at the moment, one of temporising with the Japanese while organising defence and persuading the United States to be a partner in it. In the United States also, the Roosevelt Government was not indifferent to the fate of South East Asia and kept sounding the British and Dutch Governments regarding facilities which might be available to the American armed forces for action in that area. It appears that the President was not in a position to render any effective support to the British and Dutch in their defence unless Japan had declared her aggressive disposition against the United States, which alone could spur the public opinion into action. Till that came, the United States was also prepared to negotiate with Japan.

Japan did not join her European allies, but with the German invasion of the Soviet Union all fear of the northern menace had been eliminated and the prospects of southern advance had brightened. Only two obstacles were there still, one was the presence of the powerful American navy in the Pacific at Pearl Harbour, which acted as a deterrent to Japanese advance on Malaya, and the other was their inability yet to hold the naval and air bases of Indo-China and Siam. The failure of a fresh attempt to obtain oil from the Netherlands East Indies simultaneously with the Nazi invasion of Russia, made the Japanese Government more intent on pursuing the aim of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, irrespective of its consequences. The Imperial Conference, on 2 July 1941, apparently chalked out the next steps which led to war ultimately. Emphasis on the Co-Prosperity Sphere, settling of China Incident, advance into the southern regions and total occupation of Indo-China were some of its major decisions. One thing was certain that the nation had to be organised for war to fight the United States and the United Kingdom, in case diplomacy failed to deter the former from interfering with her destiny.

As a part of her strategy, Japan had commenced negotiations with the United States, and her Ambassador had "presented, on the 11th May 1941, a scheme for a general settlement, which", according to Kirby, "included the following proposals : firstly, that the United States Government should request Chiang Kai-shek to negotiate peace with Japan and, if he refused, should discontinue assistance to the Chinese Government; secondly, that normal trade relations between Japan and the United States should be resumed; thirdly, that the United States should help Japan to acquire facilities

for the exploitation of natural resources (including oil, rubber, tin and nickel) in the south-west Pacific.”<sup>2</sup> Japan affirmed her adherence to the Tripartite Pact and threatened to aid Germany and Italy in case the United States entered the war in Europe. The American standpoint at the time was that Japan should declare unequivocally respect for territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, adherence to the principle of national equality, equality for commercial opportunity, and maintenance of the *status quo* in the Pacific region. On 21 June, again, the United States made it explicit that she would not discontinue aid to China and might even be compelled to enter the European war in self-defence, in which case no corresponding action by Japan on the other side would be justified. The difference in the approach of the two was very wide. America was not prepared to tolerate any further Japanese expansion in the south-west Pacific and was keen to put a stop to further action. Japan, on the other hand, was keen to avail herself of the resources of South East Asia, both economic and strategic, with American good will, if possible, or even without it. However, Japan did not want to be embroiled in a war with the United States immediately. Hence negotiations continued without any desire on the part of the Konoye Government to desist from action in Indo-China.

The Vichy Government was forced to submit to Japanese demands and, unmindful of the American protests and proposals for the neutrality of Indo-China with concessions for Japan to obtain raw materials there, the Japanese forces occupied the southern part of the country, including Saigon and Cam-ranh Bay, at the end of July. This action followed the freezing of all Japanese assets on 26 July 1941 by the United States, Great Britain and her Dominions and dependencies and the Netherlands East Indies, which step was taken in anticipation of Japanese military move into Indo-China and with the purpose of preventing it. This heavy blow to Japanese commerce would have completely crippled her economy and destroyed her military strength. Embargo on trade and refusal of the Dutch to yield oil must have immobilised her navy and the army. This massive danger to all her aspirations and means of Asian expansion stunned the Japanese Government, and made the army seek war with the United States for sheer existence. Collapse or war were the alternatives before them; and though the navy desired avoidance of war, yet it was prepared to seize the initiative to fight if efforts at honourable compromise failed. In August, war had become inevitable, and both the sides were conscious of its coming, though negotiations were not discontinued for some months thereafter. The declaration of President Roosevelt on 17 August and similar statement by Mr. Churchill heralded war in the east as well. Roosevelt said, “If the Japanese

2. Kirby, *op. cit.*

Government takes any further steps in pursuance of a policy or programme of military domination by force or threat of force of neighbouring countries, the Government of the United States will be compelled to take immediately any and all steps which it may deem necessary towards safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the United States and American nationals, and towards insuring the safety and security of the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Great Britain offered to side with America if the latter became involved in war with Japan as a result of her policies. The Dutch refused to give oil. Thus Japanese move in Indo-China, a step dangerous to the security of the United States in the Philippines and her interests in south-west Pacific, as well as the safety of the British and Dutch Imperial possessions, set the stage for war for which both sides began preparations. The British desire to bring America into the arena of war was nearing realisation.

The embargo on Japan marked the beginning of the eventual conflict which had become inevitable but which both the sides took measures to postpone. Delay was in the interest of the British and Dutch Governments, both for organising defence of their possessions and for being sure of American support without which they could not hope to fight with any probability of victory. The United States also recognised the value of gaining time, for howsoever the administration might be sympathetic to the Allied cause and recognise the danger of Japanese south-western expansionist aspirations, public opinion had not yet risen above the mentality of the Monroe Doctrine. The Japanese Government also, despite the spectre of the cruel consequences of the embargo and the impatience of the army to fight out the issue in the field of battle, was prepared to try another chance of negotiations before invoking the hostility of the United States. Hence the next few months, from August to November, witnessed the dual spectacle of continuation of diplomatic processes in Washington and preparations for war on either side. Konoye proposed a meeting with the President of the United States which the other side did not countenance immediately. Meanwhile the army and navy in Japan, alarmed at the rapidly depleting oil reserves and the waning of national power, demanded war as diplomacy had made little progress. However, on 6 September, the Japanese Imperial Conference arrived at a compromise fixing a deadline to the diplomatic process, which was to be early October, beyond which war was to be launched at an appropriate moment. The Imperial High Command would not wait beyond December, for every day helped their enemy to build up his strength, and the climatic conditions at the end of December would definitely be adverse to successful landings in Malaya and the Philippines. They had to complete their southern offensive operation before spring brought the danger of

<sup>3</sup>. Quoted in Kirby, p. 73.

attack in the north, when Manchurian border would admit of military operations. Thus, the period for negotiations was to be of three months which was utilised for preparations in both the camps.

It was evident from the beginning that diplomatic negotiations were not seriously intended by either party. Japan was not prepared to yield any concessions which would substantially affect her position in China or weaken her hold over Indo-China. The maximum extent to which she might go was to relinquish southern Indo-China but keep her troops in its northern parts, provided she were enabled to receive her vital supplies from the Netherlands East Indies and the United States, the freezing of assets was neutralised and no action was taken by the United States in South-East Asia. There was no expectation that the United States would yield to these demands. The declining economic strength and fast ebbing military resources were making the Japanese army and navy desperate and clamorous for war. At the same time diplomacy did not seem to be heading far in the direction of deliverance of Japan from the economic stranglehold imposed by the embargo. In the situation, moderation was out of the count. Konoye resigned on 16 October, and the Government passed into the hands of General Tojo with Togo as the Foreign Minister. With the change in government, as Kirby points out, "The period of diplomacy had ended. The period of action had begun".

The armed forces were opposed to any delay, and their argument was that "rather than await extinction, it would be better to fight while there was a reasonable hope of victory."<sup>4</sup> However, November saw a fresh activity in the diplomatic sphere and presentation of Plan A and B to Washington, which, however, had no chance of being accepted there. Plan A with a date attached to it was rejected forthwith as it sounded like an ultimatum. Plan B was the next minimum demand of Tokyo, and 29 November was fixed as deadline for its acceptance. Washington was prepared to consider some relaxation of economic pressure in exchange for the Japanese withdrawal from southern Indo-China. But there was no faith in Japanese sincerity and their pretensions to adhere to the line of peace. European situation and the growing opinion in the United States favourable to the British might also have influenced policy in Washington. President Roosevelt was aware of the Japanese plans of resorting to war in December. The alternative at the end of November for Washington, according to Kirby, was "to insist on Japan giving up her determination to conquer and control the south-west Pacific, or give way herself, on the fundamental principles for which she stood." Japanese proposals were not acceptable, and the war in the Pacific became

<sup>4</sup>. Kirby, p. 83.

the only remedy. For fear of adverse reactions in China, Washington did not dare to moderate the effects of freezing of assets even for civilian needs. Export of oil was out of the question altogether. All that the United States Government did was to reject the Plan B and call for complete evacuation of Japanese forces from China and Indo-China and a comprehensive settlement in East Asia. It was well known that no such proposal would be entertained in Tokyo, where on 1 December recourse to war was decided upon as diplomacy had failed to serve their ends. December 8th was fixed as the day of its commencement. The die was thus cast.

Japan was led to this step by her ambitious policy of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere no less than by her instinct of self-preservation which had been endangered by the embargo on trade and refusal of the Netherlands East Indies to supply vital raw materials. The British Government expected Japanese hostility which might erupt any time because of her membership of the Tripartite Pact, but was keen to prevent it as long as the full support of the United States was not available. The Dutch were only toeing the American line. Washington was thus the prime agent in the eastern developments. The issue before the United States was the safeguarding of her position in the two Oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific, which had been threatened by the Axis Powers. Germany and Japan, in their existing strength, challenged American interests in Europe and the western Pacific, respectively. Protection of England in the west and the security of her empire in the east were vital for American purpose, and that objective was gradually leading the United States to assume an increasingly active role in the war in the west. Direct war with Germany would not appeal to American public opinion, which might otherwise be provoked by Japanese aggression. The situation at the end of November was leading to that stage. British and Dutch preparations in South-East Asia had progressed far and the United States had acted as an interested, friendly observer at all stages. American military strength had also been mobilised. Thus when Japan decided to fight to escape extinction, the United States and the British were prepared to meet the challenge which they had expected, and which they did not hesitate to encounter in the interest of their major strategy to fight the Axis Powers.

The problem of security of British possessions in South-East Asia had figured in the strategic planning even before the commencement of war, but it was not till 1940 that it assumed any concrete shape. In all these discussions Singapore was considered to be the vital point in organising any defence of this area, and major stress was laid on the naval and air forces for its protection. However, it was realised quite early that the Royal Navy

might not be in a position to extricate itself from its Atlantic or Mediterranean involvements so as to be able to spare adequate forces for South-East Asia. Hence greater reliance for the defence of Malaya and Singapore was to be placed on the air force whose role would be to destroy or sufficiently weaken the attacking force on the sea before it reached the coast of Malaya. This led to the necessity of constructing airfields and increasing the strength of army for garrison duties, which might have to be drawn from India and the Commonwealth countries.

Japanese threat to South-East Asia was not merely of concern to the United Kingdom, for any danger to the integrity of the British Imperial possessions in that region would necessarily affect the security of India, Australia, the Netherlands, East Indies and even the interests and possessions of the United States. The defence of Singapore was therefore closely related to the maintenance of the balance of power in the south western Pacific and the integrity of China. The British resources were not adequate for warding off the danger. Hence combined action on the part of the United Kingdom, Australia, Holland and the United States was contemplated. This led to a number of conferences in 1941 in some of which Indian Government was also represented. The most important of these were the conversations between the American and British Staffs between 29 January and 29 March 1941, which are generally known as ABC and their report as ABC-1. These Washington Conversations defined the grand strategy specifically, assessing clearly the place of operations relating to Singapore in the whole picture of the war. The basic principle then determined was that the European theatre would remain the vital theatre and the defeat of Germany and Italy would have priority over the discomfiture of the eastern partner of the Axis. Nevertheless, the British view was that "the security of the Far Eastern position, including Australia and New Zealand, is essential to the cohesion of the British Commonwealth and to the maintenance of its war effort. Singapore is the key to the defence of these interests and its retention must be assured." The sentimental and strategic considerations which had prompted British emphasis on the defence of Singapore did not strike a responsive chord in American thinking, and it appears that no definite steps were contemplated initially for ensuring American collaboration in counteracting Japanese threat in that area. But this situation did not continue long. With the Japanese move against Indo-China and the consequent expanding menace to Malaya, Netherlands East Indies and even the Philippines, a little more realism influenced American policy-making when subsequent conferences were held in Singapore. The American-Dutch-British conversations in Singapore in April 1941 defined the security of Singapore and of sea communications as well as of Luzon as "our most important interests in the Far

East." "To maintain the position of the Associated Powers against Japanese attack, in order to sustain a long term economic pressure against Japan until we are in a position to take the offensive" was laid down as the object.<sup>5</sup> The appreciation of Japanese move was that the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, Borneo and sea communications were all threatened; but as long as Hong Kong and Manila were not lost, and the submarines could operate from the Philippine coast, Japan would take a great risk in launching air invasion of Malaya, Netherlands East Indies or Australia and New Zealand. Hence collective action by the Associated Powers was an essential desideratum. In the allocation of responsibility for defence the United States Asiatic Fleet was to take care of the eastern portion while the Dutch and the British naval units were to protect their bases and sea communications in their zones. Singapore was to be the base of operations for the British Eastern Fleet. Land frontier was limited to Malaya and Burma; the northern frontier of the former being definitely weak strategically. Otherwise the Japanese threat was to be mainly seaborne against sea and air bases. Hence the policy then outlined was "to organise the defence system to give the greatest possible security to these bases. This together with the denial of potential air and naval bases to enemy occupation, will be the primary task of the land forces. We can thus fully employ the mobility of air forces both independently and in co-operation with naval submarine and surface forces, to effect concentrations against any naval forces or seaborne expeditions during their approach and landing, to discover and destroy enemy air forces and to operate dispersed for the protection of sea communications."<sup>6</sup>

This conference and the immediately succeeding conference between the British and the Dutch were based on the assumption that the various Powers would be operating from their respective zones and that the threat of Japanese aggression would necessarily be seaborne. Attack on Malaya and Borneo would be possible only when the Japanese had acquired military domination over Indo-China, and the invasion of Burma assumed the occupation of Siam, as that of the Netherlands, East Indies and Australia and New Zealand implied Japanese control over Malaya and the Philippines. In the defence measures contemplated, therefore, considerable emphasis was laid on naval preparedness. Hence zones of responsibility of the British and American Fleets were defined and the Dutch were to reinforce the British strength. These recommendations were generally accepted by the British Chiefs of Staff but on the assumption that the United States would

5. The War Department: Strategic Planning for Coalition Defence 1941-42, p. 65.

6. ADB Conversations, Singapore, April 1941. Report p. 23.

make its attitude clear about the war before counteraction measures were adopted. The suggestions of the conference did not, however, meet with the approval of the United States and no joint plan of action by the Associated Powers was framed.

Even after the Japanese occupation of southern Indo-China, no defence plans had been agreed to by the three Powers; and the British Government had also not taken any positive action to strengthen the naval force in the Far East, largely because of the differences between the Prime Minister and the Admiralty in the matter of the extent and nature of reinforcements which might be sent to the east. British appreciation that Japan would not invade Malaya and the United States had lulled defence preparations and no effective steps had been taken before the Pearl Harbour incident to anticipate Japanese moves southwards or to ensure the absolute security of Malaya and Singapore. All that was done was to order the despatch of two capital ships to Singapore and obtain some land forces from India and Australia for the protection of Singapore and Malaya.

At the commencement of war in the east, the only plan of operations which held the field was the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation of 16 August 1940, on the basis of which tactical planning had proceeded and appreciations prepared by the local commanders in Malaya. The Tactical Appreciation of October 1940, largely in conformity with the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, became the nucleus of subsequent plans, among which the 'Matador' and the 'Sandwich' were the chief. Such planning assumed the non-provision of capital ship fleet as also the occupation of Indo-China and southern Thailand by the Japanese who might launch a land-based and seaborne attack on Malaya simultaneously. In this plan the role of the three services was definitely allocated. The Royal Air Force, which was the primary arm in the defence calculations, was assigned the task of defeating the seaborne attack at sea and during landings, and the land-based attack by striking the advancing troops, landing grounds, lines of communication and military objectives. The army was to provide close defence of naval and air bases and defeat the hostile force when it had obtained a foothold on the Malayan soil. The navy had been allotted the task of local defence, and reconnaissance of, and attack on, Japanese shipping. Main emphasis was on the air force and therefore 556 aircraft were asked for. But a strength as this is not attained easily, particularly in the then commitments of the Royal Air Force. Hence the deficiencies were to be made good by a larger deployment of land forces so as to "offer the maximum resistance and to provide the maximum deterrent to attack." These were to protect aerodromes and ensure their operational worthiness. With this object, the army was to be organised for the



defence of Kelantan, Pahang, Trengganu, Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Singapore and Johore approaches in Malaya as well as its north-south communications on the west coast. For this purpose a force of four brigades in addition to the garrison troops was estimated to be required.

In this Appreciation, we find the first glimpses of the necessity to anticipate the Japanese troops in south Thailand or Kra Isthmus. But for political reasons, at that early stage, a bold step like this was not deemed feasible. It would also enhance the requirement of land forces. In 1940, however, the forces in Malaya were weak numerically and did not possess some essential equipment. There was, in particular, glaring shortage of tanks, artillery, anti-tank weapons, mortars and army cooperation aircraft. To some extent the numerical weakness was remedied by the middle of 1941 when the 9th and 11th Indian Infantry Divisions, though not in full strength, the 8th Australian Division and the nucleus of the III Corps had been brought to Malaya. The air force was also increased though not to the strength required. Even at that time, emphasis was on defence by air force and not the army, hence neither the strength nor the disposition of land forces was calculated to afford all round defence. There was, at the same time, no clarity about the method of siting the defence on the east coast where practically all the aerodromes were situated. The paucity of forces prevented holding every point on the coast which made it possible for the Japanese to outflank the defences. Any attempt to hold the beaches might "result in a purely linear defence, with insufficient troops in hand for counter-attack." The alternative was, therefore, "to fight on a prepared position in rear where the road leading into the interior could be defended." This view did not find favour with the General Headquarters Far East, which insisted on holding the beaches. All round perimeter defence also was impracticable. The mode adopted, therefore, was to have the first line of defence on the beaches, prepare obstacles and defence posts at Mersing, Kuantan and Kota Bharu, and site depots on the Kuala Lumpur—Penang line of communication where troops might be based and be independent of Singapore.

The entire military thinking at the moment was defensive and all planning was based on the assumption that the Japanese invasion would be sea-borne to meet which reliance was placed on the air force. But with the increasing interest of Japan in Indo-China, a land-based invasion by way of south Thailand was considered a probability, and in that contingency the Kra Isthmus acquired great strategic value. Both Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and General Percival grew conscious of this direction of threat, and planning assumed a new complexion. The result was the formulation of the Operation Matador, the object of which was defined as meeting

the invader beyond the northern frontier of Malaya on the soil of south Thailand or in the Kra Isthmus which contained the main line of communication leading into Malaya. An essential aspect of this plan was to provide forward defence which was to be achieved by moving the 11th Indian Division across the Malayan border to hold Singora and to fight defensively on the Patani-Kroh route. The advantage in this position was that the defenders might be able to block the main road to Kroh in north Perak. The whole idea underlying this plan was to forestall the Japanese in Singora, long before they attained the Malayan frontier. But the execution of a scheme as this involved violation of the integrity of Thailand which was then neutral. Hence the British Government insisted on its prior permission before such a venture was launched upon. The scheme was so attractive that actual reconnaissance was held and preparations were being made. An attenuated plan, styled Sandwich, was also prepared which was intended merely for destroying port facilities at Singora and then falling back to Jitra positions. In this operation only the 6th Indian Infantry Brigade and 1/14 Punjab were to be committed. These plans of offensive action were hedged in by many limitations, hence the entire reliance was only on defensive planning which contemplated within its purview the northern and eastern portion of the country, besides the island of Singapore. The disposition of land and air forces was made accordingly. The emphasis was on the protection of aerodromes and the denial of the railway and road communications to the Japanese if they succeeded in intruding in the north. The ultimate direction of defence was the naval base of Singapore which was the main object.

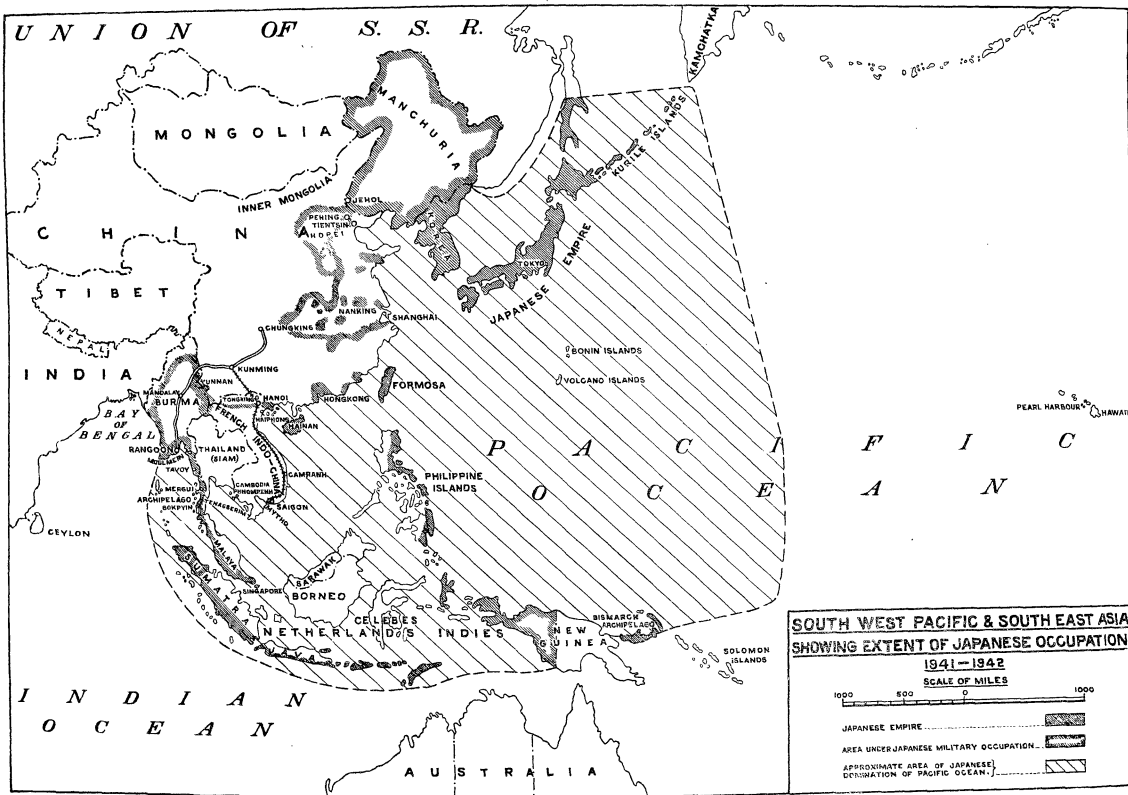
The defence preparations were in two sectors, the northern frontier and the eastern coast. In the north, the nucleus of defence was the siting of positions at Jitra and the ledge which stood guard respectively, on the two roads leading south of the Kra Isthmus, one from Alor Star into Kedah and the other from Patani to Kroh. In addition, another position at Kedah was under contemplation and work had begun on it with the purpose of protecting the right flank of the Jitra position. The main purpose of the northern defences was to provide protection to Alor Star aerodrome and delay the Japanese advance for as long as possible. The 11th Indian Division was assigned the responsibility for these defences, but it was clear to everyone that the force was not at all adequate for the task, and as such there was no enthusiasm about the Jitra position. The officers were keen to meet the invading forces at Singora. On the eastern coast, which was much more undeveloped in the matter of communications, three areas were selected for siting defences, the object of which was, as in the northern sector, to provide protection to aerodromes. These had been prepared in the Kelantan, Kuantan and East Johore areas. More-

over in the last, there were two towns, Mersing and Endau, of great strategic significance as providing good landing beaches and connecting road to Singapore and the west coast. The task of the army was to guard the aerodromes and, in Johore area, to defend the beaches and watch the main arteries of communication. The 8th Indian Infantry Brigade was assigned the Kelantan area, the 22nd Indian Infantry Brigade had Kuantan as its charge, and the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade was placed in the Johore area. General Percival was conscious of the inadequacy of the force for the tasks allotted to it. The Singapore Island had a separate system of defences which were planned as fortress defence with independent aerodromes and fixed naval defences. The operations as initially planned, leaving out Matador or Sandwich which were never implemented, were pre-eminently defensive in character and lacked depth. The whole aspect of defence was linear and there were not even adequate reserves to resist the invader, once the first line of defence had been broken or outflanked. This weakness was quite evident to the commanding officers, but they had no alternative as the land and air forces were not sufficient to organise defence in depth.

As against this relative weakness of defence in Malaya—and the position was no better in Hong Kong, Burma or even the Dutch possessions—the Japanese strategy had been chalked out so as to exploit the principle of surprise to the fullest extent. They decided on a simultaneous attack in great strength on the Philippines and Malaya and, after defeating resistance there, to advance southwards and capture the Netherlands East Indies by launching an invasion from two directions. The invasion of Philippines was necessarily to bring in the United States into the war, hence a carrier-borne attack on Pearl Harbour to cripple the United States Navy was to be a preliminary to the south-western move. The last of the regions to be occupied was Burma, which had immense strategic value.

General Kirby, in his book *The War Against Japan* has given an outline of the final Japanese plan for war against the British, Dutch and the American Powers in South East Asia. It was divided into three periods, the first comprised "attack on the American Pacific Fleet at Hawaii, the Seizure of the southern region; and the capture of the strategic area required for the formation of a strong defensive perimeter round the Japanese mainland and the newly-acquired territories. The perimeter to be established ran from the Kuriles, through Wake Island, the Marshall and Gilbert Islands, the Bismarck Archipelago, New Guinea, Timor, Java, Sumatra and Malaya to Burma and the Indian border."<sup>7</sup> In the next two periods the task was to consolidate and strengthen the perimeter and intercept any attempts

<sup>7</sup> Kirby, p. 91.



by hostile Powers to pierce it. The object was thus a limited one, namely, of acquiring a perimeter which would give Japan economic independence and defence security. The operational plans for the various areas were based on the necessity of eliminating the air power of the defenders before the invading forces might land there. The period of attack was again divided into phases. In the first phase the war was to begin with six simultaneous operations. These were: "(1) a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour. . . . (2) occupation of Siam to secure a land base for operations against Malaya and Burma and to cut British communications to Malaya; (3) landing in northern Malaya and the Isthmus of Kra, as the first step towards the capture of the Singapore base; (4) air attacks on Luzon. . . . (5) attacks on Guam and Wake to sever American communications with the Philippines, and on the Gilbert Islands, and (6) the invasion of Hong Kong to eliminate the British outpost." All these attacks were to synchronise. In the second phase fell the occupation of the whole of Malaya and the Singapore Naval Base, the capture of airfields in south Burma and preliminary operations in Java, and Burma. The third phase comprised capture of Java, Sumatra and the invasion of Burma. In the second period, when all the phases of the first had been completed, fell the consummation of the operations in Burma, and the occupation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. For all these southern operations four armies consisting of nearly fifteen divisions and some independent brigades were assigned. Adequate naval and air forces were also allotted for the transport of these forces. The entire force was alerted for war on 7 November and warned that it might commence on 8 December, which was a Sunday when the American Pacific Fleet would be in harbour.

The failure of negotiations in Washington, which at one stage had shown signs of accommodation between Japan and the United States, set the stage for hostilities to begin in the Pacific theatre also. American diplomacy was largely influenced by the considerations of the fate of Chiang Kai-shek. The United States Government presented the 'Ten Point Note' to the Japanese envoys, in which complete withdrawal of Japanese forces from China and Indo-China and the recognition of the National Government alone in China, were the main demands. This the Japanese could never accept and the die was cast for war. The British Prime Minister was keen for the entry of the United States into the war and, as has been mentioned earlier, American collaboration in the defence of South-East Asia was taken for granted. The American administration was also, not improbably, inclined to render effective aid to the British Government in its fight against fascism, and as such was not prepared to yield to the Japanese aspirations. War in the east, in these circumstances, was inevitable

and Japanese strategy had been clearly laid out. American Fleet had some warning as well; but Pearl Harbour was not considered to be threatened, while Philippines was the main area where danger was most apprehended. The Japanese move in South-East Asia, however, depended for its success only on the prior crippling of the Pacific Fleet of the United States, without which their plan of the conquest of Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies might have been frustrated. Thus; on Sunday, 7 December, early in the morning, Japanese aircraft flown from carriers attacked the Pacific Fleet which was collected in Pearl Harbour, and within a short time almost destroyed it. The whole Fleet was incapacitated and for a long time it failed to be an active force in the Pacific Ocean. Simultaneously, there was an invasion of the Philippines, where in spite of a large but untrained force, the American General Douglas MacArthur was forced to leave the country which was brought under Japanese occupation. The third simultaneous move was against Malaya from Indo-China where war opened on 8 December. The island of Hong Kong, a British colony, was also attacked on the same date and within the next 17 days, all British opposition there was defeated.

The island of Hong Kong was acquired by the British from the Chinese Manchu Empire in 1842 and had remained an open port, more a commercial centre than a point of strategic significance. In subsequent years territory on the mainland, known as Kowloon, was obtained from the Chinese as also some small islands in the vicinity. This distant British outpost on the Chinese coast did not have to face any danger till Japan repudiated the Washington Treaty and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had been terminated. With the commencement of the China Incident, Hong Kong also grew conscious of insecurity which enhanced with the capture of Canton by the Japanese in 1938. It was evident that in the event of war with the United Kingdom, Japan would attack this tiny island through Kowloon and the New Territory on the mainland; and after June 1940, the danger had grown quite acute. Yet despite the mounting threat, the defences of Hong Kong had not been developed on any scale. It was officially considered as "an undesirable military commitment, or else as an outpost to be held as long as possible." Its only value then was as a port of access to the Chinese through which nearly 60 per cent of arms were imported. Hence the defence plans contemplated the retention of the harbour only as long as possible, and no schemes were there for the protection of the mainland. The island was not to be evacuated largely because that might have acted adversely on the morale of the Chinese. In case of attack, which was not unexpected, resistance was to be offered on the mainland only as a delaying action to afford time to the defenders on the island.

The garrison normally consisted of two battalions, one Indian and one British. In 1940 it was doubled and in 1941 two Canadian battalions also arrived. Thus the land forces consisted of two brigades, one on the mainland and the other on the island under the command of Major General Maltby. The Indian element consisted of 2/14 Punjab and 5/7 Rajput. The fighting value of this small, heterogeneous force was however not very high and there was practically no air power available for its support. The garrison had only six planes, antiquated and based on Kai Tek, the only aerodrome located on the mainland. No fighter planes were ever sent to Hong Kong, and the number of anti-aircraft guns was also very small. It was clear that from the very outset of the war, the Japanese would have undisputed air superiority, an advantage of great significance in modern wars. Similarly the naval defences of the Colony were also weak. The cruiser squadron and the submarine flotilla had been withdrawn, and all that was left in Hong Kong were one destroyer, four gunboats, eight motor torpedo boats, seven auxiliary patrol vessels and one auxiliary craft for minefield duty. In addition to this glaring weakness in the fighting forces, little was done in the direction of civil defence, and the large indigenous population had a considerable proportion of Chinese refugees, many of doubtful political integrity. The Japanese fifth column activities found a ready field in this population. Then there was shortage of food; medical and water supply difficulties aggravated the situation.

This weakly defended British outpost was attacked by the Japanese on the morning of 8 December 1941, not many hours after the disaster at Pearl Harbour. They had launched this invasion with a strong force comprising more than one division and equipped with heavy artillery and supported by air force. The attack began with a raid on the Kai Tek aerodrome which destroyed the Royal Air Force planes there. Simultaneously, Japanese land forces also moved into the mainland area from two directions, and engaged the British-Indian troops. Before the close of the day they had forced the defenders to withdraw some distance. However, fighting continued for another three days on the mainland against heavy odds. On 11 December, the situation grew precarious and then Major General Maltby decided to withdraw immediately to avoid a large part of his brigade being cut off. The withdrawal operation was a difficult one, but the Indian troops, 2/14 Punjab and 5/7 Rajput, performed it most creditably. The whole force on the mainland with most of their equipment, armoured cars, transport and Bren Carriers, was brought across into the island.

The next stage was the invasion of the island by the Japanese who prefaced it by an offer of peace on 13 December, if the British

force surrendered unconditionally. This ultimatum was, however, rejected by the Governor of the Colony who was not prepared to surrender as long as the garrison could obtain food, water and ammunition. But it was difficult to expect reinforcements and the Japanese attack was likely to be heavy and determined. Beginning with air attacks and a fresh offer of surrender, the Japanese forces landed on the island and fighting broke out both in the eastern and western sectors. Resistance was grim and sustained, but by 25 December it was clear that further fighting would be suicidal. The Japanese had broken through one obstacle after another and made the position for the defenders quite untenable. In this situation the Governor was advised to cease fighting and the commanders were ordered to disengage and surrender to the nearest Japanese commander. Thus ended a stubborn opposition offered by a small garrison to a powerful and numerous force which had air supremacy and had ringed off the island by reason of its control over the seas. In the absence of any expectation of reinforcement, the defenders had no alternative but to surrender after a fighting spread over seventeen days. The island of Hong Kong had no strategic value and all that the struggle there was expected to achieve was to divert a portion of Japanese forces from attacking other Allied areas of greater strategic importance. As Major General Maltby put it, the forces there "were a detachment that deflected from more important objectives, such as Philippines, Singapore or perhaps even Australia, an enemy force that consisted of two first line divisions, one reserve division, corps artillery, about eighty aircraft and a considerable naval blockade force."

## MALAYA

Next theatre of Japanese activity was Malaya where also the defence preparations were hasty and inadequate. The 11th Indian Division, as has been mentioned earlier, was assigned the role of mounting the operation Matador, but the instructions were halting and verging on timidity.

On 5 December, the Far East Command was informed by the Chiefs of Staff that if it learnt of a Japanese force approaching with the intention of landing on the Thailand coast, operation Matador might be put into operation immediately. At about 1300 hours on 6 December the air reconnaissance watching the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand reported having sighted two Japanese convoys of warships and transports, south-east of Point Camo in Indo-China, steaming west. Two hours later when the approach of the convoys towards the Thailand coast was confirmed, the 11th Indian Division was ordered to be ready to move at short notice to carry out its part in operation Matador. After this for



a period of nearly thirty hours contact with the convoys was lost owing to bad weather. It was therefore not clear what the destination of the convoys was—Bangkok, Singora or the coast of Malaya. On the 7th, the reconnaissance by sea and air was again made and at 1730 hours a merchant vessel and a Japanese cruiser were sighted 110 miles north of Kota Bharu steaming towards Singora. An hour later some Japanese warships were sighted north of Patani moving south, parallel to the coast. Meanwhile, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham had received a telegram from the British Minister in Bangkok urging that though the Thai Government was sympathetic to the British in their opposition to Japan, this attitude might change in case the British forces were the first to violate Thai territory. Sir Robert thought that the Japanese movements were intended to provoke British forces into transgressing into Siamese territory, and that even if the 11th Indian Division were moved towards Singora it would not be able to reach there before the Japanese. Hence he decided not to put operation Matador into action since the object of Matador—to forestall the Japanese in Singora—would not be achieved. Matador having been cancelled, the 11th Indian Division was ordered to man the Jitra defence position.

On 8 December a strong Japanese force landed in the Singora—Patani area in Thailand without encountering any opposition. Singora airfield was also occupied and simultaneous air attacks were made on Singapore, and airfields in Kota Bharu, Gong Kedah, Machang, Sungei Patani, Penang and Butterworth were strafed by Japanese bombers and low flying fighters, which continued throughout the day.

Troops were also landed at Kota Bharu the same day, and these overran many of the strong points held by 3/17th Dogra Regiment of the 8th Indian Brigade. By the evening the Japanese forced other units of the Brigade to withdraw to Kedai Lalat—Kota Bharu line. Next day (9 December) the Brigade was forced to withdraw further to Peringat. Kota Bharu airfield was abandoned by the Royal Air Force, and when the Japanese had subsequently made further landings at Besut on the 10th, the airfields at Gong Kedah and Machang were also abandoned, and the Brigade took up new positions south of Machang. It was feared that the 8th Indian Brigade's rear communications might be cut by a Japanese thrust down the main trunk road in the west. By the 19th, therefore, it was withdrawn south to Kuala Lipis, step by step, against Japanese pressure.

Meanwhile it had become clear that the main Japanese thrust was coming down the west coast. The Japanese troops after landing at Singora had pushed south-ward without delay, and the 11th

Indian Division at Jitra got ready to oppose them. Although Matador—an offensive operation—had been cancelled, the Division had been kept standing by for Matador and had not been told to adjust its arrangements for the alternative defensive role which it was ultimately called upon to play. Why it was so, nobody knows, but “the adoption of the defensive therefore caused delay, for the division had to revert to its normal organisation at the same time as it occupied the Jitra position.”<sup>8</sup> It was only on the morning of the 8th that the Matador was finally considered impracticable, and instructions from Singapore were despatched to the 11th Indian Division. By the time these were received, the Japanese had a flying start of several hours.

However, a small column was sent into Thailand to delay the Japanese advance from Singora and Krohcol was to advance and hold the “Ledge” while the work on preparing the Jitra defences proceeded ahead. The Allied columns which entered Thailand began to meet with opposition from Thai constabulary and troops, which was not expected. But the Thais had already capitulated to the Japanese. The Indian columns checked the Japanese for a while, but the latter adopted outflanking methods and forced them to withdraw. Pressure was increased against the Jitra position also, and the 11th Indian Division withdrew behind the Kedah river by the 13th.

Meanwhile, a great disaster had befallen the British forces on the 10th, when the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* were sunk by Japanese aircraft off the eastern coast of Malaya. These battle-ships were steaming towards the north-east coast to attack the Japanese invading convoys, but had no fighter protection. The Japanese planes piloted by highly skilled personnel came in wave after wave and released their bombs and torpedoes on the battle-ships, which were sunk. This gave the Japanese a free hand on the seas simultaneously with their superiority in the air. Henceforth, there was nothing to stop the Japanese from employing captured shipping for landing troops behind the flanks of the defending forces on their advance down Malaya.

The British forces originally consisting of the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions, later joined by the 8th Australian Division, had numerical superiority but the Japanese tactics of jungle warfare, their ability to land in the rear of British forces, and to subsist on emergency rations proved too much for them and they gradually withdrew southwards. The British aircraft, mostly absolescent, were put out of action, and the Japanese bombing of the towns caused panic among the population, specially labour, bringing disorganisation and disorder in its wake, which made the task of the defending forces still more difficult.

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8. Kirby, *War against Japan*, Vol I, p. 185.

On the 13th-14th December, the 11th Indian Division withdrew to the area of Gurun, but no sooner had it taken up positions than the Japanese attacked and broke through the defences on the 15th, making further withdrawal necessary.

The Japanese advance was, however, never held up for long, and they continued to make progress at the rate of about 10 miles a day. The Indian Division resisted valiantly, suffered severe losses, and had to be withdrawn into Johore after having lost a series of defensive positions at Jitra, Gurun, Kampar and Slim river. A defensive line Segamat-Mount Ophil-Muar was formed by the 9th Indian Division and the Australians, but the Japanese landed in its rear and pierced the line on 15 January. The Allied troops suffered considerable casualties and a withdrawal from the mainland was decided upon. By 31 January, all Allied troops were withdrawn from all sectors of the mainland, into the Island of Singapore across the causeway which was then destroyed.

### SINGAPORE ISLAND

The pre-war British appreciation was that the most vulnerable points on the island were those facing south and east towards the open sea. The general layout of the defensive arrangements was therefore based on this assumption and very elaborate fixed defences were constructed to meet the danger from the sea. When, however, the Japanese came from the north, the preparations and plans had to be readjusted. This was not easy, but work was taken in hand on the eve of the Japanese invasion, and some sort of improvised counter-bombardment organisation was built up, and new dispositions for troops were selected, obstacles built up, and troops put in new positions as quickly as possible.

After the withdrawal of the mainland troops into the island, it was divided into three sectors for defence—the northern, southern, and the western sectors. The 18th Division and the 11th Indian Division (into which the remnants of the 9th Indian Division were incorporated) were put in charge of the northern sector with its coastline from the causeway to Changi, the area from Changi southward up to the mouth of the river Jurong was held by two Malayan Brigades and the SSVF (the Straits Settlement Volunteer Force) and the western sector was defended by the Australians and the 44th Indian Brigade. The 12th Indian Brigade was kept in reserve. The Japanese also utilised the first week of February for making elaborate preparations for the assault on the Island including a deception plan to make the defenders believe that the landing would be made on the north-eastern coast.

On February 8, the Japanese launched a fierce and prolonged bombardment of the north-western sector and then landed in the area held by the 22nd Australian Brigade. Next day they landed

in the area of the 27th Australian Brigade. The Japanese bombing had dislocated communications in the Island which enabled them to move inland quickly and seize the aerodrome at Tengah. The Australians resisted spiritedly and many cases of hand to hand fighting occurred, some during the moonlit nights. But the Australian 22nd Brigade was badly mauled and the Japanese were able to enlarge the beach-head. Considerable confused fighting occurred during the next two days in which the Indian formations were also involved in the area between the causeway and Kranji. Though the defenders fought gallantly, the tactical situation continued to deteriorate and, by 11 February, the Japanese had conquered Bukit Timah, a village situated strategically in the centre of the island, and containing the supply dumps. The Japanese were constantly reinforced and the Allied counter-attack planned for that date could not take place, as the Japanese had attacked first and penetrated into the Allied positions. Meanwhile, any attempt to gain air supremacy in the Island was finally given up on 10 February, when the few battered planes and the weary pilots of the RAF were withdrawn from the Island to Sumatra. The Japanese continued to advance and by the 13th the defenders had been withdrawn to a perimeter line around Singapore city, which was now within the range of the Japanese field battery. The city was also encircled by sea and no reinforcements could come in. A large number of people were crowded in the city which was by the 14th, being bombarded and shelled heavily. The water mains had been damaged, and the water supply was in danger of failing completely. The defensive perimeter line around the city was still intact, but General Percival saw no hope of any effective resistance to save the city, and so in order to avoid further unnecessary loss of civilian and military lives, he pressed his superior authorities to allow him to surrender. At 2030 hours on the 15th, the fighting ended in complete and unconditional surrender.

As Cyril Falls remarks, "this was one of the heaviest and most humiliating disasters ever suffered by British arms," and showed the Allied "tactical leadership as pedestrian by comparison with the dash and daring of the Japanese."<sup>9</sup>

The casualties in Malaya amounted to : British 38,496; Indian 67,340; Australian 18,490, and local volunteer troops 14,382, a grand total of 138,708 of which more than 130,000 were prisoners of war.<sup>10</sup>

## SARAWAK & BORNEO

Eight days after the attack on Malaya, the Japanese launched their operations against British Borneo also. Some defence plans

<sup>9</sup>. *The Second World War*, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup>. Kirby, *op. cit.*, p. 473.

had been prepared earlier, but they had reference to the protection of Kuching and its aerodrome only and not to the defence of the oilfield in Seria-Miri. Certain denial schemes had also been prepared and were even partially carried out by reducing the oil production and removing some machinery to Singapore before the outbreak of the war. Some wells and refinery were demolished at Miri on 8 December, the aerodrome was destroyed on the 9th, and on the 13th the Punjabi battalion and oil officials left for Kuching. This denial scheme at Miri was carried out just in time, for only two days later the Japanese anchored off Miri, and were in occupation of the oilfields and the airfield on the morning of the 16th without opposition. A ship detached from the Japanese convoy off Miri was sent towards Seria. Here too, the oil installations had been destroyed, and the Japanese force which landed there on the 16th December, took possession of the locality. The Dutch naval aircraft attacked the anchored Japanese ships on the 17th and 18th but without effect. Another attack by the Dutch army aircraft on the 19th was partially successful and scored a hit on a Japanese destroyer which was sunk.

The Japanese air force retaliated vigorously on the 19th when 15 bombers raided Kuching town, the capital of Sarawak, and its aerodrome. Approximately 100 casualties were suffered and a petrol pump was set on fire. Civilian population began to leave the city and it became impossible to procure labour. The earlier promise of air support from Singapore could not be implemented.

On 23 December a Japanese convoy was sighted off G. Santubong, and in view of the inability and refusal of Singapore to provide air support, Lt. Col. Lane, the local commander, asked for permission to withdraw from Kuching into Dutch North-West Borneo. He was told to fight as long as possible and then act in the best interests of Dutch West Borneo. During the night, the aerodrome was destroyed in pursuance of the denial policy. The Japanese landed troops in the Santubong estuary and went up the river in boats against slight opposition on 24 December. Some more troops were landed on the north and south banks of the Sarawak river and they captured the Kuching town by 1630 hours and hoisted the Japanese flag on the residence of the Raja. During the night of 24/25th, there was some fighting for the aerodrome area, where the Punjabis put up stout resistance, but suffered heavy casualties. Next day, the 25th, the Japanese continued their encircling moves, and it was decided by the battalion headquarters to withdraw to Dutch West Borneo before being completely encircled. This was carried out and Sarawak thus passed into Japanese hands.

When the column of Indian and State troops reached Krokong, most of the Sarawak Rangers parted company and returned to their homes in view of their agreement to serve in Sarawak only. The Indian troops crossed the Sarawak river at this point, but as the foot-bridge was only one foot wide, all mechanical transport and heavy equipment was left behind after being rendered useless. Only two members of the Sarawak force and their English officers chose to continue with the Punjabi battalion through Dutch West Borneo and in its later moves to South Borneo. Passing through jungle tracks and bad roads, rendered muddy by rain, they finally reached Singkawang II aerodrome on the 29th. From here all European women and children who had accompanied the column were sent to Pontianak for evacuation to Java. On 1 January 1942, orders were received from Headquarters Singapore placing 2/15 Punjab under Dutch Command. This arrangement worked very unsatisfactorily but during the next few days opportunity was taken of reorganising the battalion which had suffered nearly 300 casualties by now and had lost much of its arms and equipment. The remainder of the battalion was divided into four "mono-class" companies: A-Sikh, B-Punjabi Mussalmans, C-Khattaks and D-Jats, armed only with rifles, Bren guns and sub-machine guns. Two companies were deployed in the forward area, one on the aerodrome and the fourth was kept in reserve. On 9 January the Japanese launched a strong attack on the forward troops and forced them back, but the latter were able to stabilise the situation next day.

Meanwhile the Japanese were bringing up reinforcements and consolidating. Another defensive line, manned by troops of C and D companies was pierced by the Japanese on 17 January, and an immediate withdrawal to Sanggau became necessary. Landing strips, stores etc. at Singkawang aerodrome were destroyed and fresh plans drawn up for the defence of Sanggau roadhead. On 27 and 28 January, the Japanese attacked these new positions and Indian and Dutch troops had to withdraw again. Simultaneously, the Japanese landed on the west coast of Borneo and advancing north-east and south captured some places without much opposition from the Dutch. The Indian troops fought a few more minor actions at Penaring and other places but had to withdraw. This brought all fighting against the Japanese to an end by 29 January. The gruelling march of the troops across the swampy hinterland of South Borneo was followed by the bitterness of surrender on 31 March.

## CHAPTER VII

# The Retreat From Burma

The Japanese had begun their expansion in South-Eastern Asia with the invasion of Malaya, but even before that operation their Co-Prosperity Sphere had included Burma, largely because of its rice and petroleum as also owing to its situation on the Bay of Bengal, for control over its extensive coastline afforded domination over the Indian Ocean and the waters which surrounded India. Whether the Japanese ambitions were confined to the occupation of Burma or even embraced the possession of India, it is difficult to say; and their abrupt halt on the eastern frontier of India would lend weight to the impression that Indian conquest was not included in their plans of western expansion. Yet it is doubtful if this attitude would have continued if Germany had succeeded in its Middle Eastern projects or Russia would have succumbed to Nazi aggression. In that eventuality, it is known that Hitler had planned to march against India, either through Iraq and Iran, or across the Caspian Sea; and in that case Japan must have projected its armies against India which might have been caught between the two big pincers, from the west and the east. It was this danger which made the Indian authorities anxious about the defence of Burma and identify its security with that of India. Naturally, therefore, when the threat developed to the integrity of Burma, the India Command grew eager, in spite of the political separation of Burma in 1937, to throw the available resources into the balance to save the eastern neighbour, which operated as a bastion for the defence of India.

In all earlier defence planning, the security of India on its eastern frontier was taken for granted and the only direction from which any danger was apprehended was the north-west. However, in 1927, when Burma was an integral part of India, limited threat was appreciated to north-eastern border of Burma from Chinese aggression. But the General Staff in India considered such a possibility to be a remote contingency. Up to 1939, both in India and England, any land attack of Burma was regarded as unlikely. In that year, however, Japanese aggression in Thailand was taken into account and it was then felt that Burma might be the victim of air attacks, but even then the General Officer Commanding, Burma Army, did not rate land threat seriously and felt that air attack from Siamese aerodromes was the only "big danger". Even with the advent of war and the mounting fear that Japan

might hurl its armour on the side of the Axis in the east, till a late date, danger to the security of Burma was discounted. The Singapore Defence Conference, in 1940, also laid great store by the security of Singapore and appreciated greater threat to Malaya. Burma's importance was merely as a line of communications with Singapore and as a channel for supplies to the Chungking Government. Nonetheless, the Conference admitted that for the purpose of general defence Burma was an outpost of India and that any threat to Burma or its occupation by the Japanese was a direct menace to eastern India and the installations of imperial importance situated there. On this appreciation the Conference made an estimate of the forces required for its defence. But the Chiefs of Staff in the United Kingdom were of the view that both the threat of attack and the demand for forces had been overstated. Such a view continued to hold the ground till a fairly late date; and as a result of this thinking Burma was devoid of the means of defence late in 1941.

All this time, however, it was recognised that Burma might be assailed through Thailand, though the means of communication between the two countries were extremely limited and the terrain was definitely inhospitable. The entire military thinking in these days, and that was confirmed by the experience of fighting in Europe and North Africa, was based on the use of motorable roads for the movement of modern armies. Hence appreciations regarding threat to Burma took account of the only motor road in Thailand which stretched from Thazi to Chiengrai. The Thais were at that time improving the road between Chiengmai and Chiengrai and the Burmese frontier. This line of advance, however was not deemed to be dangerous for the security of Burma, as it did not directly threaten any vital points within the country, and left ample ground for manoeuvre by the defence. At the same time Rangoon with its extensive communications was not menaced. Invasion through the Shan States or Karenni was a difficult operation; and that gave a sense of complacency to the defenders. Another area which might afford ingress to the invaders was Tenasserim where Mayawadi on the frontier provided the easiest route into their interior. But the Dawna Range was an obstacle though without much depth, and once this screen was pierced through, the invading forces might emerge into a level and comparatively easy country. Entry into this region exposed Rangoon and once it was threatened the entire defence might be dislocated. Thus, for the invasion, Thazi and Mayawadi routes were appreciated, but largely defence preparations were contemplated against the former.

On this basis, in October 1941, the Commander-in-Chief, India, and the General Officer Commanding. Burma Army, were of the opinion that the Japanese attack could develop against the



Shan States and its scale might not exceed two divisions. Land, sea and air threats might develop against Moulmein, Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point in Tenasserim; but unless the Japanese occupied Yunnan, the Northern Shan States might not be threatened. Later when war with Japan became imminent, the Burma Army was asked to maintain the integrity and stability of the imperial air route to Singapore by defending the landing grounds. The other important function of the defence in Burma was to safeguard the Burma Road and communications with China. When the Japanese had begun their advance into Malaya, in December, the danger to the two sectors, Southern Shan States and Tenasserim, was realised, but neither the weight of attack nor its direction was correctly appreciated, and the only object of defence of Burma was that of being subsidiary to the defence of Malaya or that of maintaining communications with China. In this mood it is no wonder that the preparations for defence in Burma were of a limited character and were not based on the need for the security of the frontiers of India.

The nature of appreciations determined the character of defence plans. The gravity of threat being apprehended against the Southern Shan States, a major portion of the limited armed forces in Burma was assigned for the protection of Central Burma to meet the spearhead of attack through Chiengrai. Danger to the airfields in Tenasserim was also realised, but the only alternative was to evacuate the defending forces from Victoria Point by sea, and for the garrison in Mergui to be evacuated to Tavoy. The main object of defence was to delay the hostile advance until it attained the line of the Salween River which was to be held at all costs. Any major attack landwards, through the Dawna Range was not then appreciated, and therefore any immediate danger to Rangoon was discounted. The paucity of forces, the subordinate character of Burma, imperial strategy and lack of correct understanding of the potentialities of the Japanese, were responsible for this faulty appreciation and the unrealistic planning for defence.

The relative unpreparedness of Burma to meet any large scale invasion was due to many factors. Primarily it was the result of the political situation which had followed its separation from India. The latter, in spite of the intimate interest in the security of its eastern frontiers which bordered on Burma, was denied any say or share in the defence organisation of the former after 1937. A separate command, directly under the War Office in the United Kingdom, was set up in Burma, where meagre frontier forces and auxiliary troops were organised in an independent Burma Army. By its very nature, and largely owing to the limitations of supply, the solitary source of which was the United Kingdom, the Burma

Army was not by itself in a position to encounter the Japanese attack. The frequent suggestions by the Commander-in-Chief of India to place Burma for operational purposes under the India Command were not heeded to, and though with the fast approaching imminence of emergency, India was called upon to despatch troops to the extent of two brigades to Burma and render other assistance, the full responsibility for its defence was not assigned to India till four days after the entry of Japan into the war and that too for a fortnight only. Then promises followed of reinforcements of British and African troops, and the 17th Indian Division which was earlier earmarked for operations in Iraq was also released from that commitment. But the Malayan front soon showed signs of cracking and reinforcements were more urgently required there, and these had to be diverted to the southern Peninsula from the assignment of Burma. General Wavell, the Indian Commander-in-Chief, however, set about reorganising the defence of Burma in the hope, on the appreciation of the Far East Command, that invasion of Burma would not materialise until the Japanese had completely liquidated Malayan resistance. After his visit to Rangoon, Wavell was fully conscious of the importance of that city and the deficiencies of defence there. He gave the Chief of the Imperial General Staff his estimate of the situation. In the words of Kirby, he cabled: "since Burma provided the only route for supplies to China and was an integral part of the defence of eastern India, where a large proportion of India's munition factories were sited, its security was absolutely vital to the effective prosecution of the war against Japan. Burma was however far from being secure, the defence forces were insufficient for their task and the fighting qualities of a large proportion of their units were quite unknown; the available staff and administrative services were inadequate both in quantity and quality; and above all the great weakness from the defensive point of view was the need to depend on only one port of entry and that in an exposed position."<sup>1</sup> To mend the state of affairs, Wavell asked for two bomber and two fighter squadrons, divisional headquarters and two brigades and anti-aircraft artillery and warning system. He also replaced General Mcleod, the General Officer Commanding Burma Army, by Lieut-General T. J. Hutton, the Chief of the General Staff in India, whose chief merit lay in being an efficient organiser and administrator. General Wavell also made contacts with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, so that Chinese military co-operation in the defence of Burma might be obtained.

These belated, though hurried, preparations at a time when the Japanese had launched their attack on Hong Kong and Malaya and were rolling back the British imperial resistance remorselessly were scarcely adequate to stem the tide of Japanese advance when

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1. Kirby, *The War against Japan*, Vol II, Page 15.

immaterialised. These initial preparations were based on the calculations that the Japanese High Command would not extend the scope of offensive operations by including Burma within it, before being free from the commitment in Malaya and South-East Asia. Such an optimism was born of the inadequate understanding of Japanese resources and their mode of fighting. Another weakness in the British strength was the attitude of the people of Burma and the internal political situation there. Since separation from India, the demand for independence was growing in Burma and the Thakin Party was even prepared to resort to violence to achieve this object. Thakin contacts with Japan were also known. When the war broke out their activities became more intense. In September 1941, U Saw went to England to plead for greater political freedom for his country, but he met with no response. On the ground that he had contacted the Japanese embassy in Lisbon on his way home, when war in the east had been declared, he was arrested and imprisoned in Palestine. This reaction of the British Government to their demand for independence further estranged the Thakins and other political elements in Burma, with the result that at a time when Japanese aggression was imminent, the internal situation became extremely grave. A large bit of British forces had to be retained for internal security measures; and the defence forces were operating almost in a hostile territory for they met with little cooperation from the people, whose sympathies were more inclined towards the invaders. The Indian population was viewed with suspicion by the Burmese and the general morale of the civil population was adverse to effective resistance. The result was that the first air raid on Rangoon created serious civil defence problems and set into motion exodus of the labouring population from the city which dislocated the entire civic and administrative machinery. At the same time there began a large scale evacuation of the Indians who could find no shelter in the land of their adoption and had to trek back overland to India. This situation aggravated the difficulties of defence which was handicapped by lack of supplies, and shortage of numbers besides faulty defence planning.

India also, on whom the responsibility for the defence of Burma was thrown for the moment, was not adequately in a position to hurl large forces to meet the invader. The strength of the Indian armed forces up to 1939 was based on the assumption of a limited threat to the north-west frontier, not from any major European Power but merely from the frontier state of Afghanistan or the rising of border tribes. The army had commenced its modernisation only a short time before the war began and then it was handicapped by the shortage of supplies from the United Kingdom. The only troops which had attained a higher level of fighting efficiency and were mechanised were earmarked for

imperial purposes and, with the commencement of war, had been sent to North Africa or Singapore. Expansion of Indian forces was commenced in 1940 and, by the end of 1941, sufficient progress had been made in that direction, depending on the availability of transport, arms and mechanical appliances from the United Kingdom; but the increase was intended for operations in the Middle East where many divisions had been despatched. A sizable force had been sent to Hong Kong and Malaya. The new raisings were being trained for desert warfare as their destination was the Middle East where more and more troops were required and for whose protection, in Western Asia, India had been made responsible. The then strategic planning had not minimised danger to the north-western frontier of India; and though Russia was now an ally of the British, facing the might of the Nazi arms, danger of a German threat through Iran was not a very remote possibility. The attitude of Iran and Afghanistan was not unequivocal, and the frontier tribes were always an unreckonable factor. Hence the normal security of the north-west did not admit of any relaxation, rather the new defence plans there required further reinforcements. At the same time the British rulers could not afford to be complacent about internal security which in normal times consumed a large slice of India's armed forces. In this situation, with the growing demands for troops in Africa, West Asia and Malaya, the India Command was scarcely in a position to despatch troops to Burma in sufficient strength to fortify the defences there.

Two other factors also aggravated India's inability to reinforce Burma adequately. One was the lag in communications. In spite of repeated proposals to that effect, the overland route between India and Burma had not been developed and the road systems of Assam and Burma had not been joined. On the Indian side, the means of communication in Assam and Eastern Bengal were almost primitive, for the railway system was meter gauge and single track. Roads up to the Burmese frontier had not been built. As Kirby puts it, "Land communications between the two countries, apart from some jungle paths which wound through the mountains between Assam and the upper Chindwin, were limited to an unbridged track, impassable in wet weather, from Palel to Tamu (on the frontier) down the Kabaw Valley to Kalemyo. A short stretch of bridged road led from this village to Kalewa on the Chindwin. On the opposite side of this river a rough unbridged track ran on the railway at Ye U and on to Shwebo. There was also an unbridged track down the Myittha Valley connecting Kalemyo with Pakokku on the Irrawaddy."<sup>2</sup> The border ran over high mountains covered with dense jungle, a continuation of the Himalayas, which cut off Assam and Arakan from the rest of Burma.

2. Kirby, *The War against Japan*, Vol II, p. 23.

The province of Arakan also was not connected either by road or railway with Bengal. The only communication between India and Burma thus was by way of sea, which afforded a cheap route, the shipping line being conducted by British companies. The only port of entry was Rangoon, and that made large movement of troops in an emergency with enemy control over the Indian waters, practically impossible. India could not, even if the resources were there, move forces or supplies overland and the sea route was extremely limited and hazardous.

The other limiting factor was the political situation in India which had shown no signs of improvement. The stalemate between the Indian National Congress and the Government had continued unabated. The British Government, even with the fast approaching danger to the frontiers of India, was not prepared to part with power and the war was used as a pretext for denying constitutional changes. Beyond the hope of enlarging the Executive Council of the Governor General by the inclusion of some representative Indians and the formation of the National Defence Council, the Government did not hold out prospects of establishing responsible government at the Centre or affording the Indians any control over defence measures. This did not satisfy the Congress, which desired effective Indian participation in defence, which alone could enthuse the people and bring forth their active cooperation and the total mobilisation of the country's resources, both in men and material, to stem the tide of Axis advance and defeat totalitarianism in the world. The attitude of the Muslim League was also growing harder in respect of a separate homeland for the Muslims, now called Pakistan. Their response to war effort was conditional on the partition of the country and acceptance of the separate national identity of the Muslims. There was growing opposition to this separatist demand in the country which was fast leading to a deterioration in the communal situation. The Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi had not yet stiffened its opposition to the war effort and a part from withdrawing from the Provincial Governments, which were now run by the Governors, and staging individual civil disobedience on the issue of liberty of speech, had not resorted to direct action. The result was that the war effort of the Government, whether in the matter of recruitment or procurement of supplies, was not hampered. Yet in neither of these directions was the best effort of India available and the expansion of the army was slow and the best material, particularly in the level of officers was not available. There was a sullen hostility and active indifference of the people to what the Government did and that naturally affected defence preparations. The internal security problem was also not easy, and the forces assigned to this duty could not be released.

Economically also the country was in no mood to meet the growing demands of expansion of armed forces. By the end of 1941, prices of commodities, particularly of daily needs and food, were soaring high and shortages were actually visible in every line. Food riots were also reported in some places. Little had been done to mitigate the increasing suffering of the people, who were least prepared to sacrifice for a cause which they did not recognise as their own. The country was heading towards scarcity conditions at a time when the requirements of the armed forces were growing. This economic deterioration, coupled with the political dissatisfaction at the intransigence of the Government, created a psychology which in certain sections weakened the will to resist the invader. It is common knowledge that the Axis radio broadcasts were listened to with avidity and the British reverses aroused little sympathy and were often magnified. The national leaders had not failed to express their abhorrence towards Fascism and were unequivocal in their opposition to Japan or Germany if they invaded India. But certain political groups were known to be sympathetic to Japan and Germany, and were not averse to aiding the invader by creating conditions of internal chaos. This situation was not conducive to irresistible defence in the east. The defective strategic planning, lack of correct appreciation of Japanese aims, military unpreparedness and disaffection of people in Burma, the political uncertainty in India, slow mobilisation of its resources and the multiplicity of demands on them made the defence position grave on the eastern frontier when Japan decided to invade Burma.

After its separation from India, Burma had its independent force which, till about the Japanese invasion, consisted of eight battalions of Burma Rifles, four of Burma Frontier Force and four of Burma Auxiliary Force, besides two British battalions posted in the country. The Burmese force was expanded shortly before December 1941, and the total was raised to twenty-three battalions besides garrison companies which amounted to another five battalions. The Burma Army was organised in two Brigade Groups, each of which was located in the Shan States and Tenasserim areas, respectively. This was almost the limit to which Burma on its own resources, and within the framework of the then British policy could have expanded. Nevertheless the danger of war in the east was growing imminent and, in that situation, India was called upon to provide reinforcements. In April 1941, therefore, the 13th Indian Infantry Brigade Group was brought into Burma and was located in the Mandalay—Shan States area which was then considered as the main target of attack. The three Brigade Groups were formed into the 1st Burma Division in July 1941. Later when the Japanese threat

seemed imminent, another brigade, the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade Group was sent from India in November 1941. Thus even before India had assumed the responsibility for the defence of Burma, two brigades had been despatched as reinforcements. When Japan entered the war, and the control of defence was transferred, though temporarily, to India, General Wavell estimated the deficiencies there, and then the 17th Indian Division was selected for service in Burma, but only one of its brigades could reach there. At the end of December, the 48th Indian Infantry Brigade Group of the 19th Indian Division was also sent to Burma, though it could not arrive there before the end of the next month. Later the 14th Indian Division was due to arrive only in April, but then it was too late. It will be apparent from the above that besides the two weak Burma brigades formed of miscellaneous components and weak in their fighting potential the main brunt of Japanese attack was absorbed by the Indian forces, more than two divisions in strength. The other important military reinforcement was that from China, which operated in a limited sector and whose cooperation had been affected by misunderstandings which failed to resolve. The British division and the African brigades which had been promised did not arrive to turn the balance in favour of the defenders.

The Japanese strategy was fairly simple. After crippling the United States Navy in the Pacific for the moment, they desired to nibble at the imperial possessions of the British and the Dutch, besides occupying the Philippines and other island holdings of the United States, so as to build a strong chain of defence around their mainland. In this process, they had mounted almost simultaneous attacks on Hong Kong, Malaya, Netherlands East Indies, Borneo, Philippines and the mid-Pacific islands. Burma also formed an objective of their strategic planning, both for protecting their flank in Malaya as well as for plugging the most important inlet into China. For ensuring the security of their Co-Prosperity Sphere in South-East Asia and preventing hostile penetration into the south-west Pacific, naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean was essential. For this, control over Rangoon and Ceylon was inevitable. Therefore the next step when Malaya was over-run and the operations there were developing satisfactorily, was to launch the invasion of Burma where the immediate object was the capture of Rangoon. This task was allotted to the Japanese Fifteenth Army, whose role was to occupy Siam, afford protection to the rear and right flank of the Twenty-fifth Army, operating in Malaya, and then to capture airfields in Tenasserim and subsequently to invade southern Burma by the Raheng-Moulmein route. This was the nearest approach to Rangoon which was the main initial objective of the invasion.

The appreciations of defence, as has been mentioned earlier, gave more weight to an attack through the Shan States by way of Thazi, and assigned a lower priority to the Raheng-Maya-wadi route, largely because of the undeveloped nature of the road in Thailand and the relative impenetrability of the Dawna Range. The meagre forces in Burma were divided between the two sectors, largely owing to the uncertainty of the direction of attack. December passed without any evidence of offensive activity, but it was clear by the end of the year that the Japanese would adopt the southern route, namely Raneng-Mayawadi-Moulmein route for their advance into Burma. The air-raids on Rangoon on 23 and 25 December, also gave indication of the purpose of Japanese strategy. It was clear then to General Hutton that Rangoon was threatened and that his primary task was to build up the defence of southern Burma and provide a formidable screen in that area for the protection of Rangoon. But the paucity of forces, impracticability of receiving early reinforcements and the distance and indefiniteness of superior command, created difficulties in putting his plan through. Burma was made over to the India Command soon after the declaration of war by Japan; but within a few days control was transferred to a new command, the South-West Pacific Command (afterwards known as ABDACOM) which was formed under General Wavell, though India had still the administrative responsibility. This division between operational and administrative control provided an element of weakness, and was not remedied despite protests and advices till a late date when Burma was practically overrun by the Japanese. Both the Government of Burma and General Wavell had stressed the grave error of divorcing India from any interest in the defence of Burma, as they had seen the dynamic change which had come about in the whole complexion of defence during the two weeks that India had assumed the entire responsibility for Burma. But their protests were over-ruled by the British Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff, who were influenced in their decision by "the overriding consideration that we must give Chiang Kai-shek the feeling that the new command stretches out his left hand to him. It is of great importance that he should support in every way and the GOC Burma should be placed in direct touch with him". General Wavell, from a distance of 2,000 miles in Java, was unable to take prompt decisions depending on the situation at the moment which was productive of uncertainties and weaknesses.

The Japanese had made their decision in November 1941 to invade southern Burma, largely as a measure for defending their flank in Malaya as also to weaken China and thus drive that state out of the war. They directed their operations, in the early stages, in December, against Tenasserim whose airfields at Tavoy,



## RETREAT FROM BURMA

JAN-MAY 1942

SCALE OF MILES

50

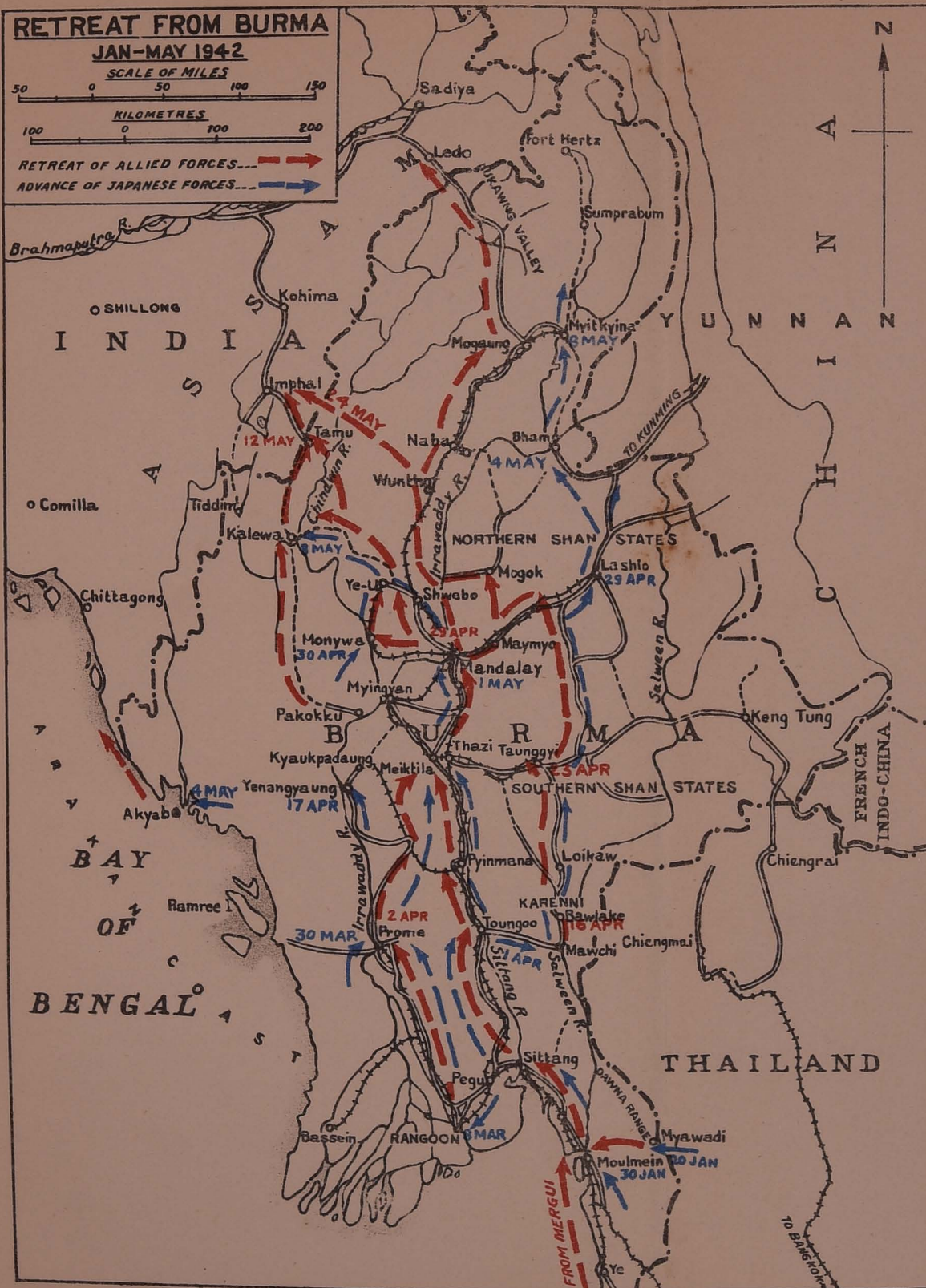
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### RETREAT OF ALLIED FORCE.

### ADVANCE OF JAPANESE FORCES



Mergui and Victoria Point provided staging centres for communication with Singapore and might be used as bases for attack on Japanese forces in Malaya. The first month was mainly used for mounting air raids on the Burmese airports, and Rangoon also suffered two heavy raids. At the beginning of the year 1942, it was apparent that the Japanese were concentrating their land forces in Thailand and that their object was southern Burma. The frequency of air attacks in the beginning of January on Rangoon left little doubt that this important port and main British base was primarily threatened. Lt. General Hutton realised this danger and, in his two appreciations of 9 and 20 January, correctly and with foresight, made a realistic forecast of the trend of Japanese offensive operations. It was clear that Rangoon was unsuitable as the base and, therefore, he decided to set up a series of depots up the north, in the Mandalay-Meiktila-Myingyan area. Also he desired that the Chinese armies must be deployed early in the Kengtung area so that the Indo-Burman forces might be concentrated in the Tenasserim area. He was clearly conscious of the impracticability of providing equal defence to the Shan States as well as the Tenasserim coast. Therefore, his plan was to site the defence forces in the areas through which practicable routes passed from Thailand into Burma. These areas were between Moulmein and the Sittang, the Keren Hills east of Toungoo and the Shan States about Mongpan and Kengtung. Another important concern was to protect the communications between Moulmein, Rangoon and Meiktila. For such a disposition of defence he required four divisions, and he asked for early reinforcements, which were not likely to arrive in time to organise his line of defence.

Early in January, the 17th Indian Division had arrived in Rangoon but that did not substantially augment the numerical strength of the forces in Burma. The 16th Indian Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Burma Brigade were placed under its command, which were later joined by the partially trained 46th Indian Infantry Brigade when it came from India on 16 January. The 17th Indian Division was given the task of defending Tenasserim, an area extending from Mergui in the south to Papuan in the north, a distance of nearly 400 miles. The 16th Indian Infantry Brigade was deployed in the Kawkaik area, covering the routes through the Dawna Range from Raheng, with the object of preventing any Japanese infiltration from that side. Even when the threat from the Raheng side was most apparent, and Japanese air activity over many weeks pointed to Rangoon being their chief objective, the 1st Burma Division was still held in the Shan States area; and the exposed sector was only thinly covered.

The expected reinforcements could not materialise before February; and they were to trickle in up to the end of April. In this situation there was only the 17th Indian Division between Rangoon and the Japanese attack whose direction and weight remained an enigma for the defenders till it actually crystallised. The Japanese exploited the situation and mounted their attack through Kawkareik on 20 January and forced the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade to fall back on Kyondo and subsequently Moulmein.

The southern part of Burma lies between two mountain systems, the Arakan Yoma in the west and the Shan Plateau and the Dawna Range, its southern continuation, in the east. The region is traversed by many rivers, the Irrawaddy in the west with its branch, the Hlaing flowing past Rangoon, the Pegu river, the Sittang, the Bilin and the Salween with its deep gorge and fast flowing stream, in the east. A number of smaller channels intersect the Tenasserim region. From the point of defence, the three rivers, the Salween, the Bilin and the Sittang, provided mighty barriers and admitted of defence being built behind them. The region between Pegu and Sittang was suitable for the employment of armoured forces. But once Pegu was reached by the enemy, not only Rangoon was exposed and threatened, but the route to Central and Upper Burma was also laid bare. Given adequate forces and with proper strategic planning, defence in depth could be built up and the rivers made into powerful trenches behind which the defence forces might assume a mighty stand. Tenasserim was a narrow strip of land between the Bay of Bengal and the Dawna Range with peaks of elevation upto 6000 feet, and the only negotiable portion was the coastal strip which had a railway and a road. But it was clear from the beginning that the southern strip from Moulmein to Mergui was difficult to defend and the Japanese threat through Kawkareik made the task absolutely impossible. The Japanese held Tavoy, and that compelled the garrison in Mergui to leave post and move by way of the sea backwards to Martaban. The repulse of the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade on the Dawna Range left the Salween as the main obstruction and Moulmein was threatened. The very length of the Salween from near Papun to Moulmein prohibited its being protected against crossing at every point. That might involve heavier defence in formidable strength, which was not however available. The only alternative was to deny the coastal area which provided easy movement and the nearest and easiest approach to Rangoon. In this strategy of defence, Moulmein-Martaban-Kado acquired immense importance as the point d'appui, the gateway leading into the passage to Rangoon. Three defence sectors stood behind it, the first Thaton-Kurzeik-Paan line, the second the Bilin-Papun area and the last, the Kyaikto-Sittang

line, the bridge on the Sittang being the last hurdle. General Hutton organised his forces accordingly and disposed the 17th Indian Division in these sectors. At the same time he made frantic calls for reinforcements, which were responded to by the India Command by directing 48th Indian Infantry Brigade and some British units to Burma immediately, and 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade and the promised East African Brigades subsequently, so that there might be up to four divisions in Burma which was all that was required there.

We do not intend here to describe the fighting in Burma, which has been fully narrated in an earlier volume.<sup>1</sup> It may suffice here to mention that after the small garrisons in Mergui and Tavoy had been cut off and the foremost screen on the Dawna Range had been pierced through, the Salween remained the only obstacle to hold back the Japanese advance. General Hutton wished to fight "as far forward as possible between the enemy and Rangoon so as to have room in which to deploy the expected reinforcements." But the early collapse of the Dawna defences had frustrated this design, and the forward forces had been thrown back on the Salween before either sufficient reinforcements had arrived or the defence fully prepared in the rear areas behind the Salween. The entire area up to the Salween had been wholly exposed to the Japanese who were converging on Moulmein, in the south, and swarming on the Salween upto Papun, in the north, seeking facile crossings across the deep river. The safe strategy for the defence was to retire behind the Salween, develop Bilin-Kyaukto-Sittang area, and contain the hostile thrust there. But against the advice of the commander of the 17th Indian Division, decision was taken to make a stand at Moulmein, which both by its situation and the exhaustion of the defending troops was not very tenable. The purpose of this Moulmein stand might be twofold, that of preventing an easy crossing of the Salween at a point which commanded the main communications to Rangoon and that of gaining time to prepare the defences in the rear and enable the 7th Armoured Brigade, which was then in the process of arrival, to take up its positions. However, Moulmein did not hold long, but the interval was employed to deploy in the Salween-Bilin area, which became the main area of resistance. There was, nonetheless, a serious weakness in this new disposition. The new position would have been strategically strong if there were a large force to man the long Salween line watching every ferry and preparing hedgehog defences in depth from which mobile armoured columns might radiate along lateral communications to contain the infiltrating Japanese troops and prevent their progress towards Rangoon. But the Salween was lightly held, and beyond a few patrols there

<sup>1</sup>*The Retreat from Burma*, Historical Section publications in the series *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War*.

was not sufficient force to deny the crossings of the river to the Japanese.

Despite this glaring weakness, General Hutton stuck to the Salween line and he decided to hold Martaban securely, where the disposition of troops was directed against sea landings. He assigned to the 17th Indian Division an almost impossible task of defending Martaban, Thaton, Pa-an, Bilin, Kyaikto, and Papun and to patrol the main road and railway from Martaban to Sittang Bridge. The area was much too big for a small force without armoured support. All that it could provide was a thin cover which left the individual units disconnected and exposed to envelopment and liquidation one by one. The sea still haunted the high command, for more troops were concentrated on the rail-road line to prevent a sea-landing. This left only a small force for the triangle Bilin-Papun-Pa-an which was exposed to infiltration from landward. The line had been extended and even when the divisional commander desired to shorten it by withdrawing on the Bilin line, it was rejected because of the decision to hold Martaban on the ground that the Salween line must be held. But Martaban followed the fate of Moulmein. The Japanese surrounded Pa-an, on the eastern bank of the Salween, and crossed the river by ferries between Pa-an and Papun. They thus succeeded in turning the flank of the defending forces and pressed towards Bilin. The Indian Division then retired to the Bilin river but failed to hold it, because of the exhaustion of the troops and the unpreparedness of the line which provided room for infiltration. The result was a hasty and almost disorganised retreat to the Sittang, where the bridge almost acted as a trap and crossing there ended in almost a disaster. The bridge was blown off before the whole force was across. The Indian troops, however, owing to the initiative of individuals and groups, and their unexampled courage, succeeded in repairing across the river to Pegu, in which area the 7th Armoured Brigade had taken its position.

The retreat up to the Sittang river hounded by the Japanese forces was no less trying, but the blowing of the bridge before the whole division crossed added to the difficulties of the 17th Indian Division. When its remnants reached the Pegu area, it had almost ceased to exist as a fighting force. It had lost some guns, most of its transport and much of its equipment. The total strength of infantry was 3,404 men and 80 officers, but only 1,420 had their rifles. The fighting beyond the Sittang was made necessary for gaining time to receive reinforcements. This enabled part of the 7th Armoured Brigade to be disposed in Pegu area. But the defenders were unable to halt the Japanese advance long enough for the infantry brigades to come from India

in time or the Australian division or African brigades to be brought into Burma. The disaster at the Sittang forced Hutton to the conclusion that Rangoon could not be held and he decided on its evacuation, which was countermanded by the superior command. General Wavell, being remote from the realities of the situation, saw no reason "to abandon fight for Rangoon and continue retrograde movement." He wanted "most resolute and determined action" and asked Hutton to resort to a counter-attack with the armoured brigade and the remaining troops to the east of the Sittang, if possible. His instructions were: "In any event plans must be made to hit enemy, and hit him hard, if he ever succeeds in crossing. He will go back quick in face of determined attack." How unrealistic these words were; and it exposed the mistake of placing operations in Burma under a distant commander. The Chiefs of Staff also, unmindful of the local situation, desired that Rangoon port "should be held so long as its retention contributed to the keeping open of the supply route to China but that, should the Japanese cut the Burma Road, any attempt to hold the port, once it had been isolated, merely to impose delay on the enemy was risking the loss of the garrison and would not be justified."<sup>3</sup> The overland route from India did not still exist and could not maintain any large force in Burma. But the reverses in the first stage of fighting, the disastrous retreat across the Sittang and the suicidal gap of no less than thirty-five miles between the build up of the forces in the south and the Shan-Karenni area, made the task of holding Rangoon hopeless. The weakness of command was realised at this time and, with effect from 22 February, Burma was again reverted to the India Command. There was change of the commander in Burma also and Hutton was replaced by General Alexander, who was sent to galvanise the fighting and provide stimulus to the troops.

The 17th Indian Division had retired to Pegu where it was reorganised, but it was still licking its wounds and not quite fit to assume a counter-offensive role. The 7th Armoured Brigade, in its attenuated form was deployed in the Pegu-Waw area, as the tanks were unable to move forward because of a canal. The 2nd Burma Brigade had moved south but between the positions of the two forces there was a big gap. The Chinese army was concentrating at Toungoo in the north. The Japanese had reached the Sittang which they crossed between Kuzeik and Myitki and headed west-south-westward to cut the Rangoon-Prome road as also to occupy Syriam oil refineries. Their object was an early occupation of Rangoon before reinforcements, which were on their way, could arrive to strengthen the defence. Their strategy was directed at the encirclement of Hutton's army in

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3. Kirby, Vol II, page 81.



Pegu and Rangoon areas and its liquidation as a preliminary to the move northwards to deal with the Chinese army and cut off China from the south. The Japanese were in a hurry to capture Rangoon so that their own line of communication might become easy. This was clear to Hutton and, therefore, realising the impracticability of clinging to Rangoon for long, particularly because of Japanese air superiority, the refusal of the Australians to send their division to Burma and the paltriness as well as the rawness of the Indian units on the sea, he decided to evacuate Rangoon, carry out demolitions and retreat northwards to the oil-fields area, before it was too late. His strategy was regarded as defeatist and was countermanded by General Wavell, who directed General Alexander on 3 March to stick on to Rangoon. He told him : "The retention of Rangoon is a matter of vital importance to our position in the Far East and every effort must be made to hold it. If however that is not possible, the British force must not be allowed to be cut off and destroyed, but must be withdrawn from the Rangoon area for the defence of Upper Burma. This must be held as long as possible in order to safeguard the oilfields at Yenangaung, keep contact with the Chinese and protect the construction of the road from Assam to Burma".<sup>4</sup> This was future strategy determined by the India Command and decided the course of action for the next two months.

General Alexander after assuming command tried to organise a counter-offensive and bold stand in Pegu, largely with a view to accept and utilise the reinforcements on their way to Rangoon. But even with his dynamic personality and the courageous stand taken by his troops in Pegu, the task was beyond the capacity of the defending forces. The Japanese advance was surging ahead and the danger of being cut off and encircled was mounting fast. Realising the threat he ordered evacuation of Rangoon and retreat of the forces towards Prome before it was too late. The Japanese then occupied Rangoon and sealed the fate of Burma as well for some time.

The purpose of retreat was to hold Upper Burma which guarded the route to China, protect the oilfields area and the construction of road from Assam to Burma. The destination ultimately was India behind the forest clad, inhospitable mountains on the Assam frontier, for India alone could provide a base for a future counter-offensive to conquer Burma and South-East Asia back from Japanese occupation. The best retreat is "a slow retreat, offering incessant resistance, and bold, courageous counter-strokes, wherever the enemy seeks to gain excessive advantage". The Indian forces exemplified this principle in their

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4. Kirby, Vol II, p. 86.

strenuous march overland to Assam. The retreat was executed in three stages. The first stand was planned in the Prome area, but the reverses suffered by the Chinese army at Toungoo and its inability to prevent the Japanese infiltration northwards compelled the 17th Indian Division and its associated troops to retreat further north to the second stage in the dry zone, south of Taung-dwingyi where the terrain was appropriate for armoured action. This would provide protection for the oilfields as well. But the rapid Japanese advance northwards and their encircling movements compelled further retreat which was effected when the oilfields had been destroyed by fire and machinery demolished. The third stage was planned for the Mandalay—Meiktila area, where final resistance was to be offered preliminary to the withdrawal to India behind the defensive wall of the Chindwin and difficult mountain screen. But in none of these zones of resistance was there available any strong fortress protection or any natural defence. Reinforcements were also not expected. Hence counter-offence or prolonged stay in the zones was not the object of retreat. All that was hoped for was slow retreat, maintaining the morale of the troops to save a disastrous rout, and arrange organised withdrawal to India. This was more than executed. If there was any intention to build up a counter-offensive in Upper Burma and use it as a base for future operations, that was doomed to failure as the Indo-British troops were too exhausted to make a determined prolonged stand and the Chinese armies were unable to hold the Japanese advance in this sector and prevent them from reaching Lashio and Bhamo in the rear. Therefore, when the retreating army reached Mandalay, it had to decide on a hasty further withdrawal towards the Chindwin to escape being encircled by the Japanese who were fast moving towards that river.

The last stage of retreat was a race for the Chindwin and the land beyond. At the moment one important purpose was to provide the defence of India, but no less momentous object was to get across as much Indian force as possible and to maintain contact with the Chinese who were also moving back to the safety of India. The march to the Chindwin, the detachment of two brigades astride the river to delay the Japanese advance and crossing the river against all odds, provide an illustration of bold planning, courageous execution and high morale of the troops which enabled the Indo-British forces to reach India, exhausted and without supporting arms and much of transport, yet unbeaten and fortified with a will to fight back the aggressor.

The progress of retreat and the plans and operation orders fully reveal its success and orderly character. Up to the time that Mandalay was evacuated, operations were dictated by the desire for counter-offensive. In strategic areas defensive harbours were



prepared to delay progress of Japanese arms and inflict maximum injury and prevent them from preparing road blocks barring the progress of retreat. The retreat was so organised as to enable the force to occupy defensive positions from which strong mobile and armoured columns were detached to engage the hostile troops. These defensive positions were based on a series of brigade areas in which lower formations were sited for all-round defence. They were modelled on a fortified position with trenches and tactical wire entanglements. Concealment and ambushing were the methods adopted for dealing with the opposing forces; and deep patrolling was undertaken by armoured forces and mounted infantry. For this purpose the force was grouped occasionally between striking and defensive troops. Contact was maintained with the Chinese armies and flanks were taken care of. But ultimately when counter-attack proved infructuous and there was no alternative to continuous withdrawal, bridgeheads and layback positions were planned and executed which enabled the army to attain the Chindwin line without being completely enveloped and destroyed. This strategy of retreat was so well executed that a large portion of the Indo-British armed forces could retire to India, though without much of equipment. It was a tremendous task and reflects credit on the commanders and their men.

Withdrawing from Mandalay, the Indian and Burmese divisions made a race for Kalewa on the way to Tamu on the Indian frontier. The engagement at Monywa, guarding the passage up the Chindwin, was a hard fought, decisive action which determined the fate of the retreating army and made its further progress towards India possible. Early in May, the force had reached Kalewa, from where the passage to Tamu and thence to Imphal was facilitated. The monsoon broke on 12 May and within a week the troops were in India resting after a strenuous and hazardous retreat which had been successfully executed. Like a wounded lion, the Indian army retired into safety without losing its honour and keeping at bay the pursuers all the time. It had also escaped the monsoon, for it left Kalewa on 12 May thus escaping the exposure to its worst outburst east of the Chindwin. The Chinese forces also repaired to India by the northern route and were later reorganised there. The 17th Indian Division had been considerably mauled and thinned, the 1st Burma Division was almost disorganised and its Kachin and other components allowed to go back to their land. Thus ended the first phase of the fighting in Burma in which the Indian, Burmese, British and Chinese troops had met with a severe reverse.

It may be pertinent here to analyse the factors responsible for this third reverse of the Allied forces in the east. Burma was

lost to the Japanese soon after Malaya and the Philippines, leaving them masters of the entire South-East Asia and predominant in the Indian waters. They had occupied the Indian islands of Andamans and Nicobars, had captured Akyab on the coast and their navy piled in the Indian Ocean threatening Ceylon and the Indian coastline. One prominent cause of the defeat was the unpreparedness of defence in Burma, which was the consequence of faulty appreciations, inadequate comprehension of Japanese strength and woeful ignorance of their strategy and potentialities. The second factor was the lack of sufficient army and air forces to cope with the magnitude of the attack. Burma was accorded a low priority in the matter of reinforcements and supplies of equipment; it did not have adequate resources of its own and the only source which could strengthen its defences was India, which had been deprived of all concern with that country. It was a mistake to divorce India from the protection of Burma for its own security was so closely integrated with the safety of Burma. India was given the responsibility when it was too late to turn the tide of events and its own resources had been fully milked for the security of the Middle East. The changes in the command, absence of any armoured force in the initial stages, the weakness in the air and lack of early agreement with China, all these were other important factors making for defeat. Loss of Rangoon sealed the fate of the defence of Burma and, once that had occurred, the only course was to retreat to India which was done. The political factor in Burma was no less responsible for the disaster. The Burmese were indifferent to the fate of the defending forces, rather they were hostile to them and expressed their sympathy for the invaders. The result was that the Indian and British forces had to operate, move and retreat almost in a hostile land, amidst a sullen, angry population and suffered all the consequences incidental to it.

The retreat of the Indo-British forces from Burma brought the Japanese to the Indian frontiers, both in Arakan and Upper Burma, with the result that Assam and Eastern Bengal were now gravely menaced. The loss of supremacy in the air and the sea to the Japanese was pregnant with danger not only to the shores of India but also to its industrial region in the eastern provinces. The threat to India's security was both real and imminent and came at a time when the political situation in the country had entered a critical phase. The immediate task for the Government and the people and their political leaders was to organise defence and save the country from Axis invasions and totalitarian domination.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The Defence of India up to 1943-44

The Japanese invasion of Burma found India unprepared for defence on its eastern frontier. The retreating Indo-British forces had attained a comparative security behind the forest-clad mountains guarding the Assam-Burma frontier, and the onset of monsoon had deterred the Japanese from continuing the pursuit. The respite thus gained posed two important problems for the Government of India and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. One was to hold the Japanese on the eastern frontier and prevent their further encroachment on the Indian soil. The security of the industrial eastern region of India and the safety of its waters were essential for Allied war effort in the eastern theatre. The second was to defeat the Japanese invasion in South-East Asia and free the British and Dutch imperial possessions there. The assistance to China and the rolling back of the Japanese in the Pacific were closely related with their future position in Burma and Malaya. Both these tasks became the responsibility of the India Command initially, which had to defend the country and mount a counter-offensive in Burma with its limited resources and in the face of an adverse political situation in the country.

The security of India's extensive borders had always engaged the attention of the Government and, even after the First World War, various plans had been drawn up for this purpose. But till the Japanese threat became a stern reality after the opening of the Second World War, the north-west frontier had been the traditional pre-occupation of the Indian army and its Commander-in-Chief. Throughout the nineteenth century, Russia continued to be the main hostile element in that quarter and all defence preparations were directed towards making the north-western tribal area safe against intrusion by the Russian forces, in alliance with Afghanistan or in spite of its opposition. The attitude of the frontier tribes also made it incumbent on the Government of India to safeguard the strategic routes and positions there, with the result that the preponderantly major portion of the Indian army was disposed in that region or was oriented to take care of the north-western defences. In the early years of the present century, for a decade, the Russian danger had abated, but with the advent of Communist regime in that country, soon after the First World War, the direction of India's defence once again came to be governed by the Russian factor. With the deteriorating

relations between the Soviet Union and the British Government, in the second part of the third decade of this century, planning attained a new momentum. The then appreciation was that the Soviet Union, with its control over Central Asia, could mount a two-pronged attack on Afghanistan and through that country eventually on India. The northern or the Hindukush sector of Afghanistan, leading to Kabul and thence to Jalalabad and Khyber Pass, was the first region exposed to Russian threat. The second area was the southern or western sector, extending from Herat to Kandahar and thence to Bolan Pass in India. Both the northern and southern areas were deemed to be vulnerable, and preparations for defence were planned in both these sectors. In the early plannings Afghanistan's friendliness was taken for granted though later on it proceeded on the assumption of Kabul's hostility, when the direction of threat had changed from Russia to the Axis Powers.

The first important plan was the Defence of India Plan which held the field for many years. It was prepared not to meet any pressing emergency but was in the nature of thinking ahead to counter any danger in future from the direction of the Soviet Union. Its object was to preserve the integrity of Afghanistan and resist the expansion of Russian dominion southward. It was based on the assumption of the friendliness of Afghanistan and the purpose of operations was to assist that state in maintaining its integrity against Russian aggression, to develop lines of communication and advanced bases for offensive operations against Russia. The then appreciation by the General Staff was that the Soviet forces might develop a many-pronged attack over an area extending from Chitral, in the east, to the Persian Gulf, in the west. The main theatre, however, was to be the northern border of Afghanistan which converges on the two main points of Kabul and Kandahar, against which nearly ten divisions might be deployed. The Chitral side was not so much threatened owing to the difficulties of communication. The Kabul region was deemed to be most exposed and, initially in the Northern Line, Indian army was to operate. The Kandahar side admitted of considerable deployment of hostile forces and even Seistan was recognised as likely to be invaded. But the danger in that theatre, called the Southern Line, was to be met ultimately by the British Expeditionary Force, the role of the Indian army being merely to operate as covering force in the initial stages. The main centre of hostile action was the Northern or Kabul Line where the Indian army was to operate pre-eminently.

The Defence of India Plan as prepared between 1928 and 1932 assumed Afghan friendship, but the General Staff in India did not subscribe to that view and was influenced in its thinking

by the hostility of frontier tribes also. Therefore that elaborate and comprehensive Plan did not suit the purpose of India as it included offensive operations beyond the Helmand, or on the Hindu Kush, and presumed considerable deployment of British forces which might not be always available. What the General Staff desired was a plan which was confined primarily to operations in the Kabul-Kandahar area, to deal with Afghan hostility and tribal opposition, and be based on the limited resources available in the country. The uncertain attitude of Afghanistan was also an important factor determining its thinking. Hence the General Staff prepared its Blue, Pink or Interim Plan, in modification of the Defence of India Plan or as complementary to it, in the decade before the declaration of the Second World War. The Blue and Pink Plans were considered at a time when King Amanullah's attitude had created a situation of crisis. But with the accession of King Nadir Shah, who was a friend of the British, immediate threat to peace had disappeared. Nonetheless, planning as an anticipatory measure was not discontinued and was based on the possibility of attack either on the initiative of the Afghan Government or in consequence of hostile activities of the frontier tribes. The object was outlined as the protection of the North West Frontier of India from foreign aggression and to compel Afghanistan to sue for peace without causing any disruption of the country. The operations, thus, were to be limited in their extent, and envisaged largely the defence of the frontier area upto the Indus, and advance not beyond the line of Jalalabad and Kandahar. The Pink Plan which held the field for many years, was conceived in three stages, and involved action both in the Northern Line towards Kabul and the Western Line towards Kandahar. Besides the Covering Troops on the frontier, the Field Army of four Indian divisions and four cavalry brigades with the line of communication troops were to be employed in the two sectors. But before the Pink Plan was brought into action, the international situation had altered radically, so that in the changed situation this plan also became obsolete and was substituted by the Plan of Operations of 1938 which remained effective for the first two years of the war.

In an earlier chapter mention has been made of the planning in the north-west on the eve of the war. However, to bring out clearly the state of defence, the position may be repeated here. The 1938 Plan of Operations had emerged out of the thinking which had been conditioned by the changed international situation in 1936 which had altered the direction of threat. The postulates underlying the Pink Plan did not hold good any longer. Besides the uncertainty of the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the British Empire, there was added the unequivocal hostility of the Axis Powers whose expansive ambitions in Asia, both

to the west and east of India, posed a new danger to the integrity of the country and the stability of British rule here. This situation had created new demands on the Indian army which was called upon to garrison far flung British positions in Egypt, Palestine, the Persian Gulf region and Singapore and Hong Kong. With the emergence of new hostile Powers in Germany, Italy and Japan, the gravity of danger was no longer confined to the North-Western Frontier alone. The long sea-Coast of India was also deemed exposed to danger of attack and provision had to be made for local naval defence. The threat in the east was recognised as developing, but as yet the landward security on the eastern side was not taken into account. However, internal security assumed new dimensions and had to be given due recognition in any planning. All these factors contributed to the comprehensiveness of the 1938 Plan of Operations.

The General Staff in India did not change its view regarding the Soviet Union, which, in spite of the altered international situation, was still regarded as "a potential enemy" against whom vigilance was not to be relaxed. Therefore the new Plan of Operations, as the earlier ones, envisaged war with Afghanistan whose government was to be compelled to sue for peace as soon as possible. No foreign assistance to that state was contemplated in such a planning. But the sympathy of the Muslims of India to it as well as of the Congress, resulting in widespread disaffection in the country against the British, involving adequate arrangements for internal security, was not lost sight of. The Plan of Operations reviewed the existing deployment of Indian armed forces, and came to the conclusion that the Covering Troops on the North-West Frontier might have to be strengthened by the allotment of the 1st Indian Division from the Field Army for this purpose. Also there could be no diversion of the Internal Security Troops amounting to 6 cavalry regiments and 43 infantry battalions and some units of the Auxiliary, Territorial and States forces. The Field Army which might be used against any Afghan attack, joined by the frontier tribes, would comprise merely three Indian cavalry brigades, two Indian divisions and one infantry brigade. The General Staff appreciation was that war might begin with air raids and anti-British propaganda. To counter such a situation, a determined and rapid advance into Afghanistan was contemplated initially. The strategy to be adopted was to meet the hostile force as near the frontier as practicable and there defeat it. The main advance was to proceed by the Khyber route while the Chaman-Kandahar route might be utilised for holding the invading force and executing diversions. But this plan was soon dropped and the Interim Plan of 1938, was adopted. The basis of this plan was a purely defensive role, for if Afghan aggression eventually materialised

it would depend on foreign, namely Axis, assistance. The Indian army was not to advance into Afghanistan and the role of the troops was to protect vital areas in the frontier region. The Plan outlined such vital areas in different sectors, and included the defence of the North-West Frontier, internal security, coastal defence and the overseas commitments of India; and the armed forces were grouped into five categories to cope with the various requirements.

Just before the commencement of the Second World War, the whole position of India's defence and commitments of the Indian armed forces were examined by the Auchinleck and Chatfield Committees. Their recommendations involved modernisation of the army, increase in air force and stepping up the defence production. The Chatfield Committee also emphasised the view that in the new international situation, India's defence was closely related to the protection of vital imperial interests in the Middle East and South-East Asia. Suez and Singapore were the two important points in the organisation of defence of India. The insecurity of Indian waters was now fully realised, and because of the unveiled hostility of Japan and the weakening of the security of Indo-China and Thailand, the danger of air attacks on India and Burma had become real. On the western side also there was no lessening of the danger of invasion. Afghanistan still held the key to the situation, and there was fear of her joining the Axis which would provide those Powers with military bases in the vicinity of India. The danger in the north-west had not abated but rather aggravated as the Soviet Union was still not regarded in any other light than a hostile Power, and to that the danger of Axis invasion had been added. Therefore no relaxation was possible in the arrangements for defence in the north-west, rather they demanded further intensification and extension. The defence of the coastline and the security of Indian waters which were now menaced added a further liability. The north-east frontier was also affected but, even till 1939, little was done to protect that frontier. The Indian army had also been burdened with the responsibility of assigning troops for external defence by sending troops to the Middle East and South-East Asia. In this situation there is no wonder that the protection of the eastern frontier was given small priority and was neglected at the moment.

This tendency to give greater weight to the defence of the North-West Frontier continued in the first two years of the war also, as is evident from the planning for defence in 1940 and 1941. This attitude is quite comprehensible for, in the early stages of the war, neither Italy nor Japan joined their third partner of the Axis. Also the Soviet Neutrality Pact with Nazi Germany strengthened

the suspicions of Russian hostility to the British Empire. Hence the traditional fear of Russian aggression from the direction of Central Asia against Afghanistan and ultimately India, continued to dominate strategic thinking in this country. The activities of the Axis agents in the states of Western Asia and Afghanistan, and the uncertainty of their attitude, strengthened the fears of invasion from the north-western side. Hence, while measures were taken to increase the facilities for local naval defence, and external defence troops were despatched to the Middle East and Malaya, the main direction of defence planning was the North-West Frontier. At the same time efforts were made for the expansion of the Indian armed forces and for improving their equipment.

The immediate threat was still, though erroneously, regarded to arise from the hostility of the Soviet Union. In that eventuality the integrity of Afghanistan, as before, was the chief concern of Indo-British policy. The old dangers of encroachment on its northern frontier and internal disruption had revived, and India's strategy was aimed at the assistance to the Afghan Government. In 1940 the government policy was enunciated that, in the event of Soviet aggression, all practicable assistance would be given to Afghanistan to maintain its integrity and independence. The appreciations prepared in the summer of 1940 were based on this assumption, namely, that the assurance given to the Afghan Government of all-out support in the event of Soviet aggression was a definite commitment for which provision of armed forces must be made. Also it was realised that though the danger of Soviet military action might not be imminent, the danger of German subversive activity in co-ordination with Soviet agency did exist at the moment, which might threaten the stability of the Afghan Government. The plan which was then prepared was likely to be effective only in the summer of 1941 and was based on the traditional strategy of simultaneous advance on both the Northern and the Southern Line for which necessary forces were assigned. The Army Headquarters adopted the plan, known as Plan A or Plan for the Assistance of Afghanistan, and provisionally the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions together with force troops were earmarked for the purpose. A directive was also issued for expanding the force which was increased by nearly 50,000 men. But this plan did not meet with the approval of the British Government which was unable to release India from the obligation to send forces in the Middle East, and in the new developments was unable to render any effective assistance to the Indian army in the matter of equipment. The result was that Plan A was kept in abeyance, and an Interim Plan was drafted in July 1940, based on a modest offensive-defensive policy in the Jalalabad area. But even this plan



was dropped owing to the altered international and domestic situation.

The second half of 1940 brought new danger to the security of India on its western frontier from possible German or Soviet action. India was then being developed as a military and industrial base and thus any threat to its security from the west might embarrass the British war effort. Hence the planning of early 1940 was not adequate to provide against potential dangers from the north-western side. Earlier plans had envisaged greater threat on the Northern or Kabul-Kandahar Line. The growing Axis influence in Iran and the fear that Germany might establish a strong position in Western Asia, and its forces might penetrate those states, made the entire western frontier exposed to danger. The Commander-in-Chief rightly appreciated that "the main battle area will have to be in the Western Frontier mountain belt, since it is only here that we shall be in a position, at any rate for some considerable time, to check mechanized and armoured forces. This battle area will comprise all territory Trans-Indus". This area extended from Khyber to the eastern Persian frontier in the vicinity of Duzdab and Mirjawa. On this basis the Northern Command and Western District were instructed to prepare their plans of defence. The object of these plans was to defeat the hostile attack as near the frontier as possible, and for that purpose defences were to be organised from the Durand Line to the river Indus, in one sector, and from Duzdab to Quetta and beyond, in the other. But before planning had been completed the situation which governed it in 1940 had altered in the summer of 1941, and the Soviet Union had become an ally of the British rather than an enemy, when it was invaded by the Nazi forces.

In 1941 and up to the end of 1942, the danger of German push through Turkey, Syria or the Caucasus, however, could not be discounted. Rather the situation at times became quite grave. At the same time, the military authorities in India were unable to be complacent about the situation in the east because of the growing hostility of Japan to the Western Allies. With the disappearance of France as an active belligerent and the sympathy of the Vichy Government to the Axis cause, Japan was fast assuming a position of predominance in French Indo-China, and Thailand was also threatened. From this position of vantage in South East Asia, Japan was well poised for an attack on Burma, Malaya and the eastern provinces of India as well as its eastern coast. In any planning for defence, therefore, provision had to be made both for a substantive defence of the north-west and western frontiers of India, as well as the protection of the coastline and Indian

waters. Not till the Japanese invasion of Burma and the discomfiture of Indian forces there, however, was any major attention paid to the defence of the eastern frontier, and the western side continued to absorb the strategic thinking in India and England.

On 25 June 1941, the Secretary of State for India emphasised the danger to the security of India arising from the presence of German nationals in Iran and Afghanistan and desired the Government of India to devise measures for removing this threat from there. The Chiefs of Staff in India examined the problem and were of the view that India's protective armour extended from Syria to Sinkiang, and any possible penetration of this screen by the German forces at any point would expose the country to the threat of invasion. Iran and Afghanistan were two vital points at the moment, owing to the rapid progress of German arms in south Russia which was directed against the oil bearing region of the Caucasus. Hence the Chiefs of Staff desired that all measures should be taken to prevent German passage through these two countries and German influence be expelled from there. They were conscious of the danger to Iraq, Iran and the cis-Caspian region. The Germans could adopt either the Caucasus—Iran route or could pierce through Anatolia and Syria and thereby invade Iraq and the Persian Gulf region. The Indian military authorities regarded the defence of Iraq and Persian Gulf region as vital for the defence of their North-Western Frontier. The defence of Iraq and Iran, therefore, was the first line of defence for India, and it was on that basis that the Government of India readily adopted measures to expel Axis influence from Iraq and help build up a strong force in Iraq and Iran, which was done in 1941, at a time when the eastern defences of India were fully exposed. In April, Iraq had been occupied and by September Iran had submitted wholly to the Allied control. A number of Indian divisions had been concentrated in that region, with the result that the threat from that direction was greatly eliminated. But in 1941, and for a considerable period in 1942, danger was apprehended to arise from the Caucasus and cis-Caspian side, and subsequent preparations for defence were directed towards the end of meeting it.

In March 1941, the Government of India gave the outlines of the Defence Plan, which was entitled the 1941 Defence of India Plan, and comprised coastal defence, internal security, defence of the north-west, defence of north-east and anti-air defence of the country. It was to be a comprehensive plan; but to a large extent it was oriented towards neutralising the Soviet danger, which was the traditional fear entertained by the Indian authorities. On that basis, in the initial stages, the Northern or the

Kabul-Kandahar Line assumed greater prominence. But after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, there was shift from that direction and the western frontier was considered to be more exposed. The 1940 Plan had called for the preparation of static defences in the Khyber, Kurram and Khwaja Amran areas. There was emphasis once again on their completion and blocking all possible approaches by the armoured forces. But the Western District was now believed to bear the brunt of German attack, and largely the plan was aimed at strengthening the defences in that area and meeting the threats arising from the Caucasus and northern Iran route. Hence the approaches into Baluchistan, south of Fort Sandeman, were to be blocked and defences prepared for that purpose. The Quetta area was the most important point in the defence planning on this side. For the security of the central region, the policy then laid down was that hostile forces should be met and opposed by the mobile armoured forces beyond the frontier. But as such a mobile armoured force was not available in strength, a policy of static defence was adopted as an alternative to it. The defence positions to be constructed were to be auxiliary to the armoured force and were to operate as pivots of manoeuvre. The entire defence was conceived in three concentric lines, the Outer Defences, Inner Defences and the Defence of the Bases. The first was intended to cover the two main lines of approach as near the frontier as possible with the object of delaying the hostile armoured force and offering a determined resistance to attempts by infantry divisions to open the way for the armoured force. The second was to be organised for meeting and localising any break-through by the hostile armoured force. The last was created for the purpose of countering hostile attempts by airborne troops and any other breaks-through into the main area.

The Outer Defences were planned on both the Kandahar-Chaman-Quetta and Nokundi-Nushki-Quetta lines. On the former, fortresses were to be constructed along the Khwaja Amran range at Boghra, Khoja and Spinatizha, and were to be prepared for all-round defence and withstanding a siege up to thirty days. On the other line such fortresses were to be prepared in the Galangur area. Despite the preparation of such defences there was the possibility of the hostile force piercing through the Panjpai Plain or through the Khwaja Amran Range. Hence Inner Defences were planned to block the passage to Quetta. It is not intended here to give the full details of this Plan, which will be found in another volume. Suffice it to mention here that a network of static defences was put up to bar the entry into the Quetta region and eastwards. The Indus was the last line of defence, where schemes of denial and demolition were prepared. In addition to the static defences, the main reliance was on the armoured

division which was allotted to the Western District and was to be concentrated well forward in Baleb and Panjpai. For its assistance one infantry division was allotted. The total force which was required for the implementation of the Plan came to two infantry divisions, and one armoured division, besides one armoured brigade and another nine infantry brigades. Thus more than six divisions were required for the defence of the western frontier, besides the troops for the Northern Line and the Covering Troops. The details of the Plan were worked out and the static defences were constructed also. But before the planning was completed, the situation had considerably altered in 1942 with the Japanese attack in the east. The Plan had to be revised and a new directive for planning was issued in April 1942.

From this general review of the planning for defence till the end of 1941, it will be apparent that the North-West Frontier occupied the major attention of the military authorities in India, and the Soviet Union continued to be considered the principal irritant against whose aggressive tendencies India's security had to be strengthened. The main direction of hostile thrust was Afghanistan and all plans were prepared assuming either the hostility of the neighbouring state or its cooperation in meeting the danger. Up to 1941, even when the Axis threat was fast mounting, the danger from the east was ignored and the possibility of invasion was minimised. The attitude of the frontier tribes in the north-west was also an important factor in devising defence plans. The consequence was that the entire Field Army and the vast army of Covering Troops were held for action in the North-West Frontier. The remaining force was meant for internal security which was always a major problem with the foreign government. Coastal defence was paid some attention in the closing years of this period up to 1941, but little had been done to meet any threat in that direction. The Royal Navy was the only safeguard of India for keeping the waters safe and the naval routes secure. There was not enough air force in the country to deal with any danger of air-attack, and here too the main dependence was on the Royal Air Force. This situation was not without its risks in an emergency when the British Government was involved in a major conflict in Europe. At the close of 1941, the war in Europe had not been progressing in favour of the British, they were fully occupied in North Africa and their Eastern Fleet was not powerful enough to hold back the Japanese Fleet from entering the Indian waters. The Indian army, in spite of its limited expansion, was unable to spare any considerable force for action in the east, as it was committed in North Africa, West Asia and on the North-Western Frontier. There was no relaxation in internal security either. This was the position when Japan

threatened the eastern gates of India and posed a major crisis for the country. The Chiefs of Staff in India were called upon to re-orient the entire defence planning which was then adapted to deal with the new dangers.

The Japanese began their move into South-East Asia at the end of 1941, but it was not till January 1942 that Burma was actually threatened. The danger in the north-west did not admit of being ignored. Therefore the plans which were made early in 1941 laid equal stress on the defence of India, both in the east and the west. During 1941 details of the plan for the protection of the North-Western Frontier had been worked out and the static defences in the Khwaja Amran area were under construction. But before these plans had been executed, the Japanese invasion of Burma and their predominance in the eastern waters had called for radical alteration in planning. The General Staff stated, on 8 April 1942, that "the changed situation due to the substitution of a German threat for Russian threat to the North-West Frontier and the probability of a Japanese attack on southern and eastern India have necessitated a complete revision of the plan for the defence of North-Western Frontier". It was also then the view that the projected defences in the Baluchistan area, under 1941 Plan, would not meet the new situation. Therefore, along with the preparation and planning for the security of the eastern and southern India, the western border also required strengthening. In May, the Joint Planning Staff based their appreciation on the postulate that any German attack against the North-West Frontier could materialise only on the elimination of Russia and the collapse of the British position in Iraq and Iran. However, the danger of a combined German-Japanese action against India was not beyond the realm of possibility. Opposition to German eastern advance, thus, demanded twofold defence of the protective lines in Iraq-Iran, which might be termed the external or outer defence, and the Baluchistan-Afghan area, the inner defence. The danger to the Persian Gulf, Baluchistan and Afghanistan regions was equally great. Therefore the problem then was to prevent the Germans to obtain the use of aerodromes within the effective bombing range of the bases in north-western India and the port of Karachi, as also securing a foothold in the Quetta plain. The then appreciation was that the Germans might employ two armoured divisions, three motorised divisions and air borne division in Baluchistan and one additional division in the rest of the North-Western Frontier together with four to five hundred air-craft. Such an invasion could not materialise before the beginning of 1943.

Every possible measure was taken to prevent the Germans from piercing the external barrier in Iraq and western Iran. With

the occupation of these lands by the British-Indian forces and the establishment of a large force there, the danger of a thrust had abated. Also the Russian resistance had stiffened, while the fighting in Syria and Northern Africa had denied advantage to the Germans. Turkey had also refused to change its role of neutrality. In that situation any imminent advance of the German forces through the Balkans into the Persian Gulf area was ruled out. Nevertheless, effective planning for the defence of Iraq-Iran-Syria border had been completed and strong fortresses for all-round defence to operate as pivots of manoeuvre, had been prepared there. Their effectiveness and the strength of the British-Indian force in the region were a guarantee of the external security of India in that direction. But so long as the Germans had not been completely thrown out of southern Russia, which did not happen till 1943, and their drive against the Caucasus and the Caspian did not exhibit signs of slackness, the possibility of attack through north-eastern Iran directed against Baluchistan could not be discounted. There was also the fear that they might occupy the aerodromes of eastern Iran at Meshed, Birjan, Yezd, Kerman, Zahidan and Khwash from which heavy air attacks might be mounted on Karachi and other Indian bases. The primary aim of defence was thus to deny the use of Zahidan-Khwash area to the Germans and, at the same time, to utilise the aerodromes there for the Indian air force, and for their protection armoured force might be maintained there. Its purpose was to delay the hostile German force. Behind this forward belt, primary resistance was to be organised in the Khwaja Amran-Nushki area with the ultimate object of defending the Quetta-Pishin plateau. In the last resort, retreat behind the Bolan Pass was to be effected by employing demolitions to the largest extent. In the northern sector, similarly, the fixed defences in the Khyber and Thal-Manudri areas were to be employed for denying the use of the Khyber Pass to the hostile forces. The security of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan area was the ultimate object where the last stand was to be made. A force of two armoured divisions, two anti-tank brigades, five infantry divisions, in addition to the Frontier Defence and Reserve troops, besides 27 squadrons of air force, were to be employed for the defence of the north-west. The plans prepared on this appreciation did not differ substantially from the 1941 plans, except that the limitations which governed the earlier plans were ignored in 1942 in the conviction that more air force and equipment would be available from the United Kingdom.

Static defences were constructed in the Ghazaband and Khwaja Amran—Nushki regions and the construction of aerodromes, roads and static defences was also undertaken in the outer defence

area. In the rear line of defence demolitions were prepared so that arrangements were completed by the end of 1942 for the destruction of the bridges on the Indus from Attock down to Sukkur and Rohri. But by November it was clear that the Germans were unable to stage an attack on India in the immediate future. The unbroken Russian resistance had made it impossible for the Nazi forces to swoop southwards. Meanwhile the defence of Iran and Iraq by the Indian and British forces had been strengthened and the fighting in North Africa had been adverse to the German hopes of advance eastwards. Nonetheless, the traditional fear of the vulnerability of the North-Western Frontier did not admit of any complacency on the part of the Indian military authorities. Hence the preparation of defence was not discontinued. In the Instruction No. 1 of 1943, the General Headquarters reiterated that "as Germany might intensify further and accelerate her political and subversive efforts to embarrass us by causing trouble in Afghanistan and in our own tribal areas, with a view to locking up our resources, it was necessary for the Indian land and air forces to exercise tribal control and to plan to meet a German attack". Therefore in 1943 no relaxation was possible on the western front.

In this context of the commitments on the western side, both in the matter of the so-called external defence on the Iraq-Iran border and the inner defence on the Baluchistan and Afghanistan frontiers, planning for the defence of eastern and southern India against a possible threat of Japanese invasion was undertaken. India had sent seven trained divisions to the Middle East and there were not sufficient troops available for the protection of the vast coastline and the eastern provinces which were increasingly threatened by the Japanese advance in Burma. The security of the Indian waters was also violated and the British Eastern Fleet, which was the mainstay of Indian defence, was unable to prevent Japanese naval intrusions into the Bay of Bengal or even the western waters. Ceylon was also threatened by the unhindered movement of the Japanese navy. The danger to India was greatest in the months of March to June 1942, during which period the British Government was scarcely in a position to strengthen the Eastern Fleet or despatch adequate air-craft to India to organise defence. With the fall of Rangoon on 8 March 1942, in the words of Kirby, "the danger to Ceylon and the whole of the eastern and north-eastern coastline of India became incomparably greater. India's situation at that period was in many ways similar to that of Great Britain after Dunkirk : well trained troops were scarce and equipment scarcer still. It was obvious that only a small part of this long line could be protected. There were those areas of great strategic importance : Ceylon with its naval

bases at Trincomalee and Colombo; Bengal, with the port of Calcutta and its industrial areas; and the frontiers of India in Eastern Bengal and Assam."<sup>1</sup> This danger was not merely hypothetical. The Japanese were keen to open the sea route for the supply of their army in Burma, which was not practicable as long as the Eastern Fleet was based on Ceylon. Hence they decided to attack the naval bases in Ceylon and launch air attacks on the Indian coast, "firstly to ensure the safe passage of convoys to Rangoon and secondly, to impress the people of India with Japanese might and foment trouble in India at a time when Anglo-Indian political relations were particularly delicate".<sup>2</sup> The first attack came on Colombo, but the British losses were not severe. The navy subsequently suffered losses in the sinking of ships, and Trincomalee faced an air raid. The Japanese fleet had escaped unscathed after destroying one aircraft carrier, two heavy cruisers, two destroyers, and a number of merchant ships in Ceylon.

India also did not escape at this moment. Simultaneously with the incursions of the Japanese fleet in the waters around Ceylon, the British shipping in the Bay of Bengal was attacked by another wing of the Japanese navy, which directed three of its detachments against the eastern coast of India between Cocanada and Vizagapatam. The ports on the coast were practically undefended and the merchant ships had to sail close to the coast without any escort. This resulted in nineteen of them being sunk in one day, the sixth of April. This had the effect of almost closing the port of Calcutta, which city suffered air raids also, though later. The western coast also could not remain safe for the Japanese submarines had sent nearly 32000 tons of merchant shipping to the bottom of the sea. On 6 April, Cocanada and Vizagapatam were bombed also. These air raids did not cause much damage, but had the effect of creating a panic, forcing the people to vacate the port towns. The panic spread to Madras also resulting in the evacuation of the non-essential personnel, shifting of the government offices, immobilization of the port and the dislocation of railways. The danger of invasion of South India was felt to be imminent. Thus in April 1942, with the loss of southern and central Burma to the Japanese, their hold on the Andamans, and mastery of the Bay of Bengal by the Japanese navy, the threat of invasion of eastern and southern India was appreciated as high. Land, air and sea attack—all were feared. Consequently measures had to be adopted and plans prepared for the defence of the country against the eastern invader, simultaneously with taking steps for the security of the north-western frontiers which were exposed to a German invasion. The British

1. Kirby, II, 106.

2. *Ibid.* II, 115.



Eastern Fleet was not powerful enough to maintain the security of Indian waters and thus one basic presupposition of India's defence was exploded. The Indian land forces, despite considerable expansion, were engaged in the Middle East or were poised on the North-Western Frontier against the traditional fear of invasion. The remaining forces, land or air, were not adequate then to resist the eastern invader whose invincibility for the moment had weakened morale. The political policy of the British towards the Indians was also not calculated to arouse the national will to fight the enemy; and internal conflicts between the two major communities blurred the prospects of united effort. April and May were the months of the greater danger, but the threat did not materialise for perhaps the Japanese Imperial Staff did not wish at that time to enlarge their field of conquest.

Till this hour little attention had been given to the defence of eastern frontier of India or its extensive sea coast. In the strategic calculations before 1939 and the plans of defence prepared subsequently, static defence of some of the major ports had been provided for and a token air force, piloted by auxiliary or voluntary personnel, had been assigned the task of reconnaissance and protection. The 1938 Plan had made provision for the defence of coastal region against any possible raids but did not entertain any fear of an invasion in strength, either by land or by sea from the eastern side, and no comprehensive plans were prepared for eastern defences. The Singapore Conference, later, also did not consider any danger to arise for India from the growing hostility of Japan, and concentrated on the security of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. In the middle of 1940 again a comprehensive appreciation of Japanese aggressive intentions was made, but even then no early threat to eastern India was apprehended. All that was then feared by the General Staff was that the Japanese might have access to the Indian Ocean, consequent on their occupation of the Netherlands East Indies. Singapore was the bastion on which the security of India depended, and this was to be held at all costs. In the Defence Plan of 1941 a more realistic tone is apparent, for besides providing for local naval defence, coastal protection and internal security, the potential danger to the main industrial areas in eastern India by air attack was taken into account. The air defence of areas where vital necessities for war effort were being produced was contemplated, and one fighter squadron each was to be available for the protection of Calcutta, Tatanagar, Asansol and Digboi. Moreover there was provision for an observer layout and of establishing static anti-aircraft guns in these places. The ground defence of aerodromes and landing places on the seacoast was also contemplated by the Eastern Command.

But all through the months before the active Japanese advance into Burma, the General Staff in India had minimised the prospects of any large scale invasion of any part of India or its coastline from the east. Their appreciation was that a Japanese raid on India would be of a minor and hit and run nature, largely for creating a psychological effect on the Indian population so as to influence the weight of India's contribution to the war effort in the Middle East or South East Asia. It was this assumption which prevented the General Staff from accepting in full the proposals of the Eastern Command, submitted just on the eve of Japan's entry into war, for the reorganisation and strengthening of the armed forces in eastern India. The Eastern Command desired to locate a brigade group each at Chittagong, Imphal, Digboi, with the divisional troops at Manipur Road, for Assam, and one brigade each at Kharagpur, Barrackpore and Dhanbad for Bengal, besides the 93rd Indian Infantry Brigade, which was to be moved from Delhi to Calcutta, for preparing beach defences at Balasor, Diamond Harbour and Port Canning. Both before the Japanese invasion of South East Asia, and immediately thereafter, the General Staff discounted the possibility of a major threat and did not want any preparations beyond the stationing of fighter squadrons and organising passive air defence for the ports and docks. But this complacency could not long continue and the rapid advance of the Japanese forces in Malaya and Burma, leading to the occupation by them of important naval and air bases, made the authorities in India fully aware of the menace facing its security. By March 1942, with the fall of Rangoon, air, naval and land attack, all were regarded as possible. Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Vizagapatam, Madras and Ceylon were considered to be the areas threatened by land, air or sea-borne attack.

Planning for the defence of India had been taken up quite early, and we have a number of appreciations and plans drawn up by the Eastern Army and the Joint Planning Staff and comments on these by the General Staff and the Commander-in-Chief. In the early stages up to the occupation of Rangoon and southern Burma by the Japanese, the emphasis was on the fear of sea borne invasion or air attacks, and there was no definite apprehension of any menace to Assam or invasion by land of Bengal and other eastern parts. There was also considerable difference of opinion between the Chiefs of Staff in the United Kingdom and the Commander-in-Chief in India regarding the threat to Ceylon and the disposition of defence in India. While the British authorities laid stress on the importance of Ceylon, which they regarded as the key of defence, General Wavell and his advisers sensed greater danger to eastern India where vital

war industries were located, and considered the defence of Assam and Bengal of primary significance. On 7 March 1942, his appreciation was that the direction of Japanese advance would be against Upper Burma and subsequently north-east India, and regretted that the troops and aircraft which were required in that region were being diverted to Ceylon. This view he reiterated time and again over the next few days. But the War Office did not subscribe to his estimate of the Japanese threat and stuck to the opinion communicated on 13 March to Wavell, viz. "We agree with your conception of forming bastions in north-east India but the problem is to decide what portion of our slender resources it is right to allot to this area *vis-a-vis* Ceylon. In our view the security of our Indian Empire depends in the last resort on our ability to conduct sea communications in the Indian Ocean. For this we must have secure naval bases, and the only ones in sight for some time to come are in Ceylon. For these reasons we consider that defence requirements of Ceylon must be given priority although we agree that north-east India is very important, and also appreciate potential internal security problems with which you may be faced in Bengal and eastern India". In the existing weakness of the Eastern Fleet and the various commitments on the Royal Navy, the War Office desired to maintain an adequate air and land force in Ceylon to prevent its capture by the Japanese. This view held the ground for sometime, and the raids on Ceylon by the Japanese fleet justified this stand too. But the Japanese swing against Upper Burma and the consequent occupation of the whole of Burma by them by the middle of May, enhanced danger to the eastern parts of India, and Assam and Bengal were exposed to invasion by way of land and sea.

The Joint Planning Staff analysed the strategic situation in the paper of 14 March 1942, and emphasised the urgency of effectively organising the whole of India for purposes of defence. They were conscious of the probability of a combined German and Japanese aggression and therefore could not discount the potential threat to the north-west also. However, greater threat was to the east and a Japanese invasion in that direction might have serious consequences in various spheres. A big refugee problem, probability of 'fifth column' activities, large-scale desertion of labour, breakdown of civil administration and dislocation of law and order, threat to internal security and loss of morale throughout the population of India, having its natural effect on the Indian troops, would flow from any Japanese attack on Assam or Bengal. Hence every effort must be made to prevent invasion from the east. This view found support in the Commander-in-Chief's Conference on 17 March which decided to concentrate all efforts into the defence of the north-east India and Calcutta.

The policy then outlined was to defend India to the utmost capacity, and the region east of the Brahmaputra was to be organised for mounting counter-offensive operations in Burma. The Japanese aggression must be resisted as far away from the main industrial area as practicable and such a line was the Assam-Bengal frontier.

On the basis of these recommendations, the Commander-in-Chief issued his Operational Instruction No. 1 on 23 March 1942, directing the Eastern Army to defend north-east India against invasion. The main intention was defined as that of fighting for Bengal and Assam as far forward as possible. The vital areas to be defended were communication lines to Assam, Digboi oil-fields, air bases in Bengal, Calcutta with its port and the industrial areas of Bengal. Assam had acquired importance as a base for counter-offensive in Burma and was to be prepared with that object. The Commander-in-Chief also stressed the value of offensive action against the invading force which was to be achieved by conducting operations on a wide front with columns of the size of a brigade group or less. Also he desired preparation of defended localities to cover important river crossings and centres of communication. Organisation of guerilla bands and a system of demolition were also advised. Thus, by the end of March, before Burma had fallen wholly to the Japanese, a definite plan for the defence of the north-east of India had also been prepared and every effort was being made to raise the armed strength and build up the morale of the country.

The deteriorating military situation in Burma, consequent on the loss of Malaya and Singapore, the weakness of British naval power in the Indian waters, the pessimistic appreciations apprehending invasion of India and the immediate need for expanding the army and building up India as a base, as well as the pressure exercised by President Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek, prompted the British Government to seek a political settlement with the Indian political parties. From January to March, the Joint Planning Staff had emphasised the danger to India and disclosed weaknesses in its defences, and had, at one stage, even contemplated withdrawal from Bengal to certain areas inland, before the forces were inextricably committed, so as to hold strategic positions strongly and use them when reinforcements arrived to launch a counter-offensive to drive the Japanese out of India. Even preparation of lines on which demolitions and denial on a large scale might be executed was contemplated. All this required lessening of tension in the political climate of the country, and seeking cooperation of the people. The invasion of Burma and the stream of Indian refugees flocking into the country, from there, spreading

tales of Japanese invincibility, British weakness and discrimination against Indians, had created panic in the country and weakened the will of the people to resist aggression. The denial schemes adopted in eastern Bengal, though on a minor scale, had created suffering and consequently resentment was mounting against the foreign government. All this came in the wake of the rising prices, general shortages and growing inflation. In the political sphere, even the show of democratic experiment had ended with the withdrawal of popular ministries in Congress majority provinces. The Indian National Congress had abstained from mass direct action in order not to obstruct the war effort of the United Nations, and had merely resorted to individual civil disobedience on the issue of freedom of speech to denounce war. The Muslim League had put forth its programme of the partition of the country and the carving out of an independent Muslim state out of the contiguous Muslim majority areas, and was prepared to cooperate with the British war effort only on the fulfilment of that condition. The British Government had failed to respond to the demand for independence and association of the people in an effective manner with the war effort. All that they could offer up to the end of 1941, as has been mentioned earlier, was the expansion of the Governor General's Executive Council by the inclusion of some representatives or eminent Indians and the creation of National Defence Council without any substantial functions, more for propaganda purposes, and that was scarcely adequate to enthuse the people or give them a sense of participation in fighting for freedom and peace. The British Government refused to adopt legislation for constitutional change during the pendency of war, and the Government of India magnified the communal cleavage as a deterrent for any political advance at the moment. Nonetheless, Japanese successes in South East Asia on the very borders of India, menacing the naval accesses to Indian shores, the formation of the Indian National Army in Singapore with its propaganda machine and schemes of large scale sabotage in India, and the impending threat of invasion, made the situation further complex and compelled the British Government to attempt a political settlement in India.

Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to New Delhi in this context in the month of March 1942, and arrived almost simultaneously with the issue of the Commander-in-Chief's Operation Instruction, already mentioned earlier. He came with a ready made solution of the political crisis which he unfolded to the political leaders. There was a certain element of finality in his proposals which had to be accepted or rejected in their totality. His scheme had reference both to the ultimate and immediate solution of the constitutional crisis. While the principle of the Constituent Assembly framing a constitution for free India after the war was

included as the long term measure, and that did not arouse much controversy, the possibility of a division of India before such an Assembly had deliberated evoked considerable resentment and opposition. But the scheme failed to find sympathy because of the absence of any spark of freedom or autonomy in the functioning of the Central Government during the war. The Congress did not find enough scope in it to rouse the spirit of the people to withstand foreign aggression. The Muslim League did not find any unequivocal declaration in favour of its demand for the partition of India. Perhaps the British Government was also in no mood to associate people's representatives in the conduct of war. Hence Cripps returned abruptly without achieving any results, and the middle of April found greater bitterness, frustration and despondency in the country when the Indian forces were fast retreating from Burma and the threat of invasion seemed to be imminent.

This deteriorating situation is reflected in the plans for defence as well, which assumed a more realistic character. These were now based on the grim resolve to "fight for north-east India and southern India with Ceylon," which was expressed in the Chiefs of Staff's directive. In April and May, till the advent of the monsoon postponed the danger, appreciations prepared by the Joint Planning Staff were to find answer to the War Office enquiry regarding the implications of Japanese action against India or Ceylon. In particular attention was directed to the stoppage of Japanese communications in the Bay of Bengal, and their lodgement in Eastern Bengal and its effect on Indian economy and war effort, the political and internal situation and the possibility of reinforcement from abroad. In the worst case of internal unrest and widespread frontier trouble, the India Command was to consider action in case the British were "forced to concentrate on securing areas essential to cover communications with Persian Gulf, *e.g.* Karachi and Baluchistan and the use of Bombay". The thinking of the Joint Planning Staff in the beginning was devoted to maintaining sea communications, but later it converged on the possible consequences of Japanese invasion of eastern provinces, its weight and the means of counteracting it. They listed the vital areas which must be defended and determined priorities in that. They were fully conscious of the limitedness of existing resources in India, and suggested measures which might be adopted to maintain position till the arrival of reinforcements. In one of their papers, the Joint Planning Staff recommended building up of a reserve in the Nagpur-Secunderabad area from where assistance might be rushed to the affected part. They defined the object as securing the bases from which naval forces might continue to dispute sea communications and, secondly, imposing the maximum delay on the invader's approach to such bases so as to gain time

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to allow for reinforcements to arrive. They wrote, "If we have to give ground, it must still be our aim to cover Bombay and Karachi as long as possible." With such alternatives of despair, it is no wonder that planning was neither bold nor determined. Naturally they envisaged the worst possible case, and in their paper No. 17 of 23 May 1942, they examined the consequences of a Japanese break-through in north-east India and the measures to meet the danger. This paper was devoted to the consideration of the main line of resistance in case of defeat and expulsion from Bengal, Orissa and Assam—the three affected areas—where defence might be stabilised. They appreciated danger to the Ganges Valley as well as the eastern coast down Vizagapatam. For resisting the hostile advance, six operational zones were defined. The Joint Planning Staff papers of April and May gave an appreciation of danger and the trend of strategy for defence. At that time danger of invasion by sea was assessed to be high but the resources, both material and moral, were low in the country.

For the defence of eastern India including Assam, both against seaborne attack or invasion by land across the Burma-Assam frontier, the Eastern Army, formerly Eastern Command, was made responsible. It was composed of the Assam Division, the XV Indian Corps and the IV Indian Corps. The Assam Division was responsible for the defence of Assam, and had two divisions placed under its command. Its headquarters was Jorhat. The XV Corps had its headquarters at Barrackpore and was the main force for the defence of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It comprised the 14th Indian Division and 36th, 47th and 49th Indian Infantry Brigades, besides 3 Inland Water Transport Group (known as Sunderbans Flotilla). The task of the XV Corps was to watch the coasts and contain and delay any Japanese landing and advance inland. The IV Corps, with its headquarters at Ranchi, was to act as mobile reserve and was to be prepared for rapid offensive action anywhere within the area of the Eastern Army except Assam. There were two divisions, the 23rd Indian Infantry Division and 70th Division under it. The chief vulnerable areas were defined as Calcutta, Parbatpur, Jamshedpur, Asansol and operational aerodromes. Its main role was that of counter-attack in case of a Japanese invasion and to prevent their penetrating inland and dislocating industrial effort of India. Both the Corps were to carry out thorough reconnaissance, build communications and prepare battle areas in their zones, which were mainly to afford cover to Calcutta, and other industrial sites. A scheme of demolition was also included in the plan.

The general structure of defence in the Eastern Army area was based on the principle of fortress defence with mobile forces for

counter-attack as in Iraq. Changes were made in it depending on the availability of forces and the intensity of danger in any sector. For example, later when the troop situation seemed to be easier, a line of communication force was organised, and when Assam seemed to be the target of invasion more forces were allotted to that Division. But in its essentials, the structure of defence continued till the danger had receded in 1943, and the defensive arrangements were transformed into a force for offensive operations in Burma. This structure for defence was based on the possibility of hostile attack developing in three main sectors, Assam to the east of Brahmaputra, the Delta area between the Hugli and Brahmaputra and the southwest coast of Bengal extending from the west of the Hugli to the Cuttack coast. The defence forces were so deployed as to assume rapid action in case any threat developed. As on the North-West Frontier, in the east also, the defence was divided into three sections, the line of communication troops, garrison for the defended areas and the striking force. Owing to the fear of seaborne landings, there was provision for effective patrolling of the coastline and the inland creeks and rivers. Also defended areas were to be prepared which were intended both as stops on communications and pivots of manoeuvre for the mobile reserve. Then there was provision for counter-attack by the mobile striking force and the line of communication areas, to facilitate the maintenance of garrison as well as the striking force and safeguard communications, and afford local defence for the vital industrial centres. Ultimately as defence developed in the winter of 1942, the IV Corps with the 14th Indian Division had been placed in Assam for protecting the vulnerable points and preparing for the invasion of Burma. For its maintenance 202 Line of Communication Area was established at Gauhati. The XV Indian Corps and the 26th Indian Division were in the other two sectors and were allotted the role of the striking force. For their maintenance 101 and 302 Line of Communication Areas were provided.

Thus was danger to be met which, however, did not materialise. The Japanese desisted from further advance beyond Burma and in that decision, were influenced by the attitude of the Indian political parties, particularly the Indian National Congress, which made no secret of its hostility to any foreign invader and abhorrence to totalitarianism, whether of the western or the eastern pattern, their extended line of communication, which became gradually exposed, the mounting American resistance in south west Pacific, and the favourable turn of war fortune for the United Nations in the Middle East, Russia and Africa. The invasion did not come but India was provided a modicum of defence preparations both in its eastern as well as southern parts. Ceylon



was also afforded protection and Indian land forces were so established in the south as to provide defence for its southern extremity including Ceylon.

The years 1942 and 1943 passed without any serious incidents, except the bombing of Calcutta and the eastern coast. The Arakan coast was occupied by the Japanese, but they failed to pierce through the Chittagong gateway and no landings occurred on the extensive Bengal and Orissa coast. The only threat which came was in 1944 when Assam was invaded and Kohima and Imphal had to suffer a long siege. But by that time, the Indian military preparations had progressed considerably and the Japanese were not only repulsed but the momentum for invasion of Burma was seized which ultimately ended in the expulsion of the Japanese forces from there and the reconquest of Burma by the British. All the time that the India Command was engaged in the defence of north-east India, it was occupied with planning for offensive operations in Burma which proceeded simultancously with planning for defence and as a part of it.

# ADVANCE INTO BURMA

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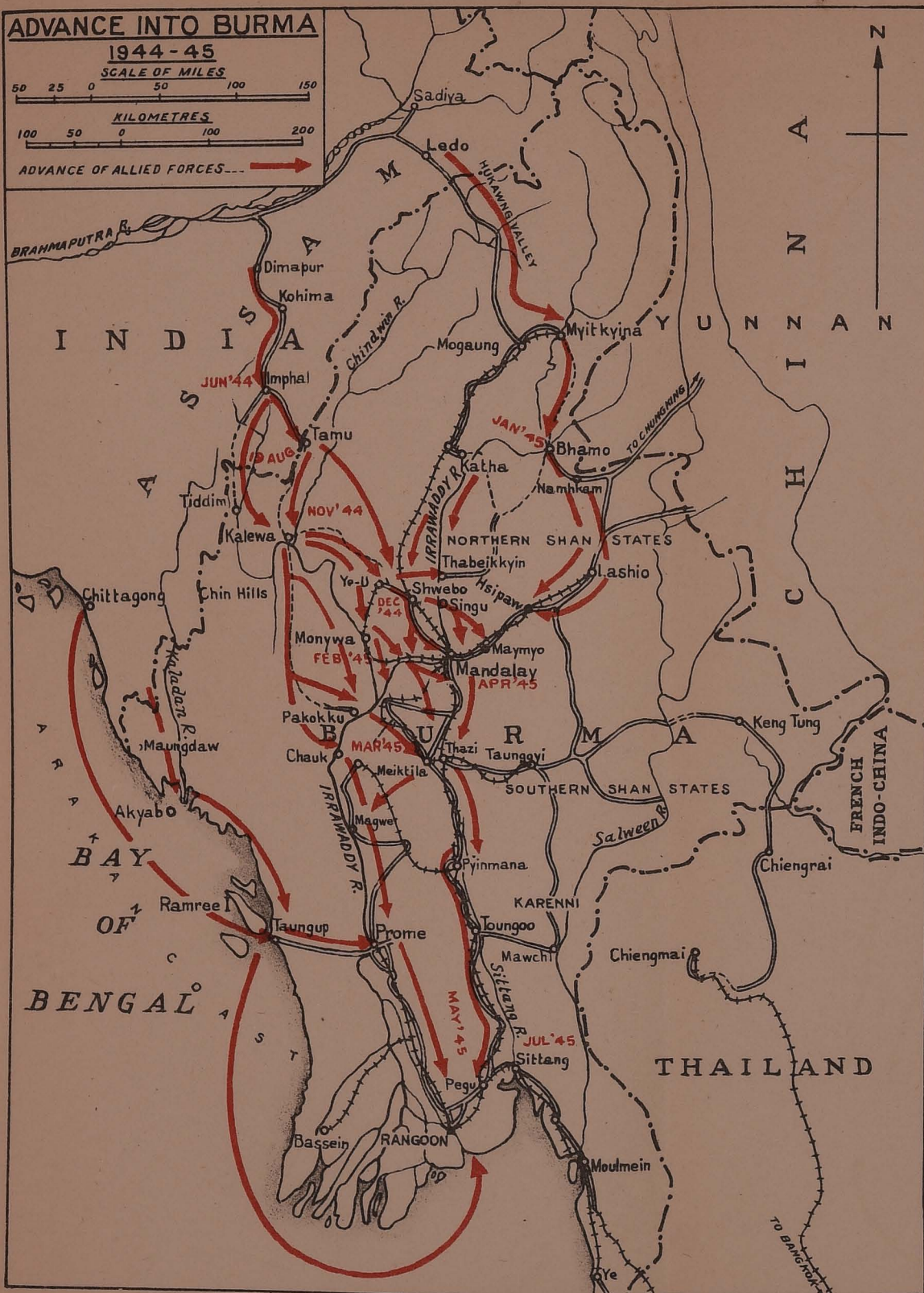
SCALE OF MILES

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ADVANCE OF ALLIED FORCES



## CHAPTER IX

# The Reconquest of Burma

The Japanese occupation of Burma in the months before the advent of monsoon in 1942 had posed a serious threat to the security of both India and China. The Indian army operating in Burma against the Japanese had retreated into India, while the Chinese army had withdrawn into Yunnan or come to India in a disorganised condition. The situation was grave. The Chinese were cut off from their allies with the interception of the Burma Road, and one immediate problem facing the Anglo-American alliance was how to reach military and other supplies to that country and maintain resistance there to Japanese advance. The hastily improvised air-lift across the Hump from Indian air bases could not, by its nature, be adequate to keep up the Chinese morale and their fighting strength. The opening of land-route through Yunnan to Chungking, therefore, was an immediate necessity. The presence of the Japanese forces on the borders of India, with their control of the Bay of Bengal and air superiority in the eastern lands, created a growing danger to the integrity of India which was exposed to threats of air, sea and land attack. The plans for the defence of eastern and southern India together with Ceylon, which were prepared in 1942, were essentially of a passive defensive character and were primarily intended to resist the further advance of the Japanese forces into Indian territories of Bengal, Orissa, eastern coast and further into the interior. But as long as Burma continued to be under Japanese occupation, and they dominated the territories of South East Asia, neither India nor China could be free from the fear of aggression, and Chinese resistance might weaken as well in the absence of adequate flow of supplies. Hence, simultaneously with the requirement for the defence of India, it was essential that the Japanese be dislodged from their hold on Burma and Malaya and the Indian waters might be made safe from their encroachments. This involved contemplating measures of counter-offence to expel the Japanese from Burma. The planning in India from its very commencement envisaged such counter-offensive measures for the eventual freedom of Burma from Japanese control.

In the initial stages there was no clear conception of objectives, which was reflected in the nature and extent of planning. The India Command and its planning staff suffered from this limitation because it was not a free agent in determining the purpose of

offensive measures in Burma. The objectives could only be laid by the policy makers in Great Britain and the United States. There was no unanimity there. The British on their own, owing to the pressure of European war and the paucity of their resources, were unable to provide means for expelling the Japanese from South East Asia and thereby retrieve their lost imperial possessions. The restoration of Burma and Malaya was possible only with American help, but the United States showed little interest in restoring their lost dominions to the British. They viewed all ventures in this region only in the context of their reaction ultimately on the Japanese position in the Pacific area and in how far they would liberate China from the Japanese hold. Their main concern at the moment was to strengthen China by rushing supplies to that state; and the United States Government was in no mood to divert these resources for the return of Burma to its old masters who were not popular there. The British Government, on its part, was keen to retrieve its honour and restore imperial prestige and possessions in the east. It valued China as a strategic base to harass Japan, but did not assess its value as very high. On the contrary the British felt that the right approach would be to assail the Japanese in South East Asia, and in their eye Burma, Malaya and Sumatra were the regions where the rolling back of Japanese aggression might well begin. This fundamental divergence in the outlook of the two allies could not but affect adversely the entire structure of planning and the character of operations in Burma in the first two years after Japanese occupation. Though planning had commenced in India as early as April 1942, it was not before 1944 that any large-scale offensive was launched; and all that was done was to mount local operations of a nibbling character which could meet with little success in making any solid impression on the Japanese. The India command did not know for long whether their role was to provide facilities for despatching aid to China by opening communications, or to convert India into a base for operations to defeat the Japanese.

The fast deteriorating political situation in India was another factor which delayed active and large-scale military operations in Burma. The return of Sir Stafford Cripps with his abortive proposals in April had intensified frustration and raised the pitch of disaffection. The sense of danger arising from the fate of Burma had increased panic, and large numbers engaged in labour and others were deserting big cities like Calcutta and returning to their villages, where the tales of the disaster in Burma and British predicament helped to lower British prestige and heighten the feeling of fear. The issue of instructions for the denial of means of transport and other facilities to the enemy and their implementation with a high hand by local officials in Bengal, depriving many

of their means of livelihood, sent a wave of resentment over the country. The denial and scorched earth policies were misrepresented and their operation exaggerated. Panic was further fanned by the host of 'Fifth Columnists' and agents of the Japanese who were to be found in many parts of the country, more particularly in Bengal and its neighbouring areas. Japanese and German propaganda was being constantly emitted by radio, which found receptive ears and was believed more than its rebuttals by British and Indian broadcasts. At the same time, with the first defeat of the British-Indian forces in Malaya, the Japanese had influenced some Indian military officers to establish a liberation army for the ultimate freedom of their land from British yoke. This idea met with a good response when the British surrendered in Singapore on 15 February 1942, and a large band of Indian officers and men was left into the hands of the Japanese to suffer the fate of prisoners of war. Many from these batches, for reasons both patriotic and selfish, chose to join the Indian National Army, formed by Mohan Singh. In the early stages of its formation, one of the activities of its members was to send agents into India to prepare the country for the eventual success of this army in its mission to free the country. Such agents did not always succeed in the objective, but the propaganda launched from Malaya and the presence of some of them in the country, could not but help to increase disaffection against the British and heighten the sense of panic and the conviction of eventual collapse of British power in the east.

More serious, however, was the attitude of the political parties in India, particularly that of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League which had the greatest impact on the fortunes of war. Reference has been made earlier to the proposals brought by Sir Stafford Cripps and their inadequacy to end the political stalemate in the country. There was, moreover, no agreement between the Viceroy and Sir Stafford Cripps, as also perhaps between the British Cabinet and their agent regarding the extent of concessions which might be made. The British Government and the Viceroy both were not prepared, during the period of the war, to reduce the powers of the Commander-in-Chief in India, and thus satisfy the demand of the Indian National Congress for a real share in defending the country. Cripps abruptly ended the negotiations and made the political situation more critical. The basic difference was in their conceptions of the character of government in India which might be established. Whereas the Congress sought a form of national government of the Cabinet type, the British Government and the Indian Viceroy did not wish to depart substantially from the type connoted by the phrase Executive Council. The British Government was not prepared

for a major change in the system of government in India; the Congress did not believe that without the glow of freedom the people could sacrifice their all for the defence of the country and cooperate in fighting the war on the side of the United Nations.

The next few months were critical and brought to a head the fast mounting disaffection and feeling of frustration in the country. The deteriorating war situation in the east and the increasing danger of invasion of India, together with the adoption of vexatious measures of denial in Bengal, provided an edge to the resentment of nationalist India. The Congress Working Committee, which had been in a mood of compromise and had desisted from extreme measures so far, was fast developing a bellicose mood. The All-India Congress Committee, which met in Allahabad on 29 April, specifically characterised India's participation in the war as wholly an act of the British Government adopted in their interest, and demanded that the British must relinquish their hold on India, not only for the security of India but also to ensure their safety and world peace and freedom. The Committee most unequivocally repudiated the idea that Indian freedom could come as a result of Japanese or German interference or through foreign invasion. Most vehemently it called upon the nation to resist it by offering complete non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not to render them any assistance. Mahatma Gandhi consistently urged upon the British to 'Quit India' and leave this country to its fate. The withdrawal of the British, he emphasised, would make the people evolve order out of chaos and lift the country from the state of 'ordered anarchy' which the British rule was.

It was in this atmosphere that the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 6 July 1942 and, after week-long deliberations, adopted two resolutions on 14 July which were later substantially endorsed by the All-India Congress Committee on 8 August. One of them dilated on the mounting difficulties faced by the people owing to some measures for defence adopted by the Government, "such as the acquisition of land for military purposes, the requisitioning of boats and vehicles in threatened coastal areas, and the scarcity of salt resulting from war conditions."<sup>1</sup> The other resolution demanded immediate termination of British rule in India, on which the people of India would form a Provisional Government representative of all important sections of the population. This Provisional Government would evolve a scheme for convening a Constituent Assembly which would

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1. Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, p. 141.

prepare a constitution for the Government of India. Also "the representatives of free India and representatives of Great Britain will confer together for the adjustment of future relations and for the cooperation of the two countries as allies in the common task of meeting aggression." The All-India Congress Committee not only endorsed the resolution but emphasised that subsequent events "have given it further justification and have made it clear that immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations. The continuation of that rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of world freedom." The Committee viewed with dismay the deterioration of the situation in Russia and China and held the policy pursued by the Allied Nations responsible for repeated and disastrous failures. The "continuation of Imperialist tradition and method" and the "domination of subject and Colonial countries" which were the foundation of the existing policy could not create enthusiasm among the peoples of Asia and Africa for the cause of the United Nations. The freedom of India alone could bring that glow, hence the Committee asserted that "the ending of the British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depend the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. A free India will assure the success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism. This will not only affect materially the fortunes of the war, but will bring all subject and oppressed humanity on the side of the United Nations, and give these nations, whose ally India would be, the moral and spiritual leadership of the world. India in bondage will continue to be the symbol of British Imperialism and the taint of that Imperialism will affect the United Nations." This was the justification for the immediate independence of India, and as the Committee's resolution put it, "Only the glow of freedom now can release that energy and enthusiasm of millions of people which will immediately transform the nature of the war." On such a declaration being made the Provisional Government of Free India would "become an ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise of the struggle for freedom".

After appealing earnestly, in the cause of freedom and peace and the success of the United Nations which was identified with Indian independence, the Committee felt, however, that it could not long withhold the nation from "endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian Government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity". Hence the resolution



sanctioned "the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale," under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who was requested "to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken." It was a definite but painful decision which the Congress Committee had taken in the interest of the future of the world and victory of the cause entertained by the United Nations. But Mahatma Gandhi pointed out in his speech that he would first ask for an interview with the Viceroy, and only on his failure to receive a satisfactory response, the resolution might become operative. There was also a proposal to appeal to President Roosevelt, Marshal Chiang Kai-shek and the Soviet Union.

The British Government, as was clear from the earlier reactions in that country, was in no mood for concessions. Mr. Amery was out to accept the challenge, and on the morning of 9 August, Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress were arrested in Bombay, followed by mass arrests in all parts of the country. The withdrawal of non-violent Congress leadership from the field, and the sudden blow struck by the Government, led to exasperation and intense resentment among the people, which burst forth in a wave of violent measures, organised by many revolutionary elements and the 'Fifth Columnists', which were directed at obstructing war effort and creating a state of rebellion in the country. The local Congress leadership, which had escaped imprisonment in the first drive by the Government, tried to divert the trend of mass struggle into non-violent lines, but its incarceration and the stern repression pursued by the authorities frustrated its purpose; and in the first flush considerable damage was done to communications and war stores. Nonetheless, the movement was relatively non-violent, aimed at denial of cooperation to war effort, withdrawal of labour from war industries and abstinence of students from their studies over many months. The Government, both civil and military authorities, took to strong and cruel measures of mass repression, particularly in northern India, which created the impression that it was more interested in suppressing all expressions of the instinct for freedom than defeating foreign invasion. Initially, the monsoon had held up further advance of the Japanese forces in the east and subsequently the American pressure in south-west Pacific and the presence of large Russian forces in the Far East, prevented the Japanese Government from throwing all their military might into the balance in South-East Asia, otherwise the Government of India might have been faced with a serious situation when a large military force had been mobilised to spread terror in the country and the communications with Assam and Bengal had been practically destroyed.



One important result of the political developments in India was that the British and Indian Governments were unable to undertake effective counter-offensive measures in Burma immediately after the monsoon was over in 1942. Heavy involvement in Africa and Western Asia, together with German pressure on Great Britain, and the slow rate of industrial recovery there, delayed adoption of plans for war in Burma on a large scale for more than a year thereafter. Meanwhile the economic situation in the country, and particularly in Bengal which was affected by famine, introduced a new complication which further delayed the initiation of the reconquest of Burma. Famines were a recurring feature up to the beginning of the present century, but the inter-war period did not witness any critical years in respect of food supplies in the country. There was "no serious food problem" largely owing to the domestic production being supplemented by imports of rice from Burma and the low level of consumption which had reduced the demand for foodgrains. However, the situation was explosive for, as was pointed out by the Famine Enquiry Commission, "so delicate was the balance between actual starvation and bare subsistence that the slightest tilting of the scales in the value and supply of food was enough to put it out of the reach of many and to bring large classes within the range of famine". A large proportion of the population lived "a hand to mouth existence, at a very low level of consumption". In Bengal this situation was aggravated by a series of crop failures beginning with the year 1938. Nature's niggardliness was abetted by war, which contributed by stopping imports of rice from Burma and dislocating normal trade channels and movement of foodgrains. Controls were imposed, barriers were set up to stop inter-provincial and even inter-district flow of trade in grains. At the same time Bengal saw a larger concentration of armed forces which enhanced the demand for food, and that was further increased by the unprecedented flow of refugees from Burma who had also to be fed. The complications introduced by nature and war were made more complex by the failure of the local administration to anticipate the situation and take timely measures to prevent it. Incompetence of the provincial administration and the callous indifference of the Central Government brought forth a tragedy. The prices rose, hoarding and cornering of foodgrains ensued and unsocial elements exploited the situation to their advantage, unconcerned with the fate of millions. The inevitable result was a tremendous loss of life due to starvation which has been variously estimated between 1.5 to 3.5 millions. This condition prevailed up to the end of 1943 and even the beginning of 1944, and consequently the mounting of a major counter-offensive operation was delayed considerably.

However, as has been mentioned earlier, the Government and the General Staff in India had initiated planning for the recovery of Burma even before the Japanese had fully occupied it. In his appreciation of 28 March 1942, the Director of Military Operations envisaged employment of offensive operations with the purpose of destroying the Japanese forces in Burma, on the principle that counter-offensive is an essential element of defence. His strategy was based on three alternative courses which were defined as (i) an attack from Assam with two divisions having for its object the capture of Mandalay and Lashio and thereby open the supply route to China, (ii) movement down the Arakan coast from Chittagong in combination with (i), and (iii) an attack on Japanese lines of communication simultaneously with the movement of two divisions in north Burma. Landing on the Arakan coast, capture of Akyab and the Ramree Islands and the cutting of the communications in the Irrawaddy valley by attacking Magwe and Prome were to accompany such operations. In the absence of sufficient air power and the yawning weakness in land forces the adoption of any plan of a comprehensive nature was beyond the resources of India. However, General Wavell considered India as a valuable base for planning a counter-offensive in Burma, and in a large measure future planning followed on these lines.

‘The monsoon gave the necessary respite and in the interval some reinforcements had also arrived in India. Meanwhile, the position had altered significantly in the Pacific, and internal situation in India had also lost its sharpness. The Eastern Army which was made responsible for the defence of north-east India, though in attenuated strength, had two incomplete Corps, the IV and XV, beside the 70th British Division and the 50th Armoured Brigade. Some auxiliary forces were also available. By the autumn of 1942, two British divisions, the 2nd and 5th, had come to India with some anti-aircraft and other units. Two Indian armoured divisions were being completed, the Burma Army was re-forming and the Chinese forces which had reached India were in the process of re-formation and being trained for counter-offensive. The air force was also considerably strengthened so that, by the end of the year, 29 squadrons were in an operational role and 20 more were re-forming. More airfields were constructed so that the number had increased from 30 or 40 to 130, and many more were planned for construction further. At the same time, transportation, which had created a serious bottleneck was also being improved. A road from Assam to Burma through Imphal and Kalewa was under construction. The Ledo Road was being pushed ahead. Railway communication also received attention and the railheads were being improved. Of course, the

existing deficiencies, the flood in Bihar and the destruction of railway lines during political disturbances, had made active operations impracticable in the early months. But with the onset of winter, situation had improved so that counter-offensive measures had a greater prospect of implementation.

General Wavell had issued instructions to the Joint Planning Staff, on 16 April 1942, to begin "consideration of an offensive to re-occupy Burma", not necessarily for immediate execution, but primarily for the purpose of assessing the extent and nature of commitments involved. It was his intention, at that time, to undertake a limited offensive in Upper Burma directed against Kalewa-Katha-Myitkyina, in October, followed by a push down the Arakan coast from Chittagong and a seaborne expedition against lower Burma. The Joint Planning Staff Paper No. 15, of 1 May was the first attempt in this direction. This paper, however, assessed the difficulties inherent in that course, and questioned the value or the exclusive feasibility of offensive operations in Burma. The conclusion which followed from an examination of all factors was that "a large scale offensive against Burma cannot be staged for some time", and that it was "dependent on many factors beyond the control of the Indian Command". There was also uncertainty about the purpose of operations, whether the object was to re-establish supply routes to China or to mount a large scale expedition for the recapture of Burma with India as the base. The Joint Planning Staff gave more weight to the strategic defeat of Japan and reoccupation of Burma which, in their view, would be more practicable by striking against the Japanese line of supply through Bangkok and the Gulf of Siam. To achieve that object they envisaged establishing "air bases in the Andamans and at Akyab and perhaps Ramree Islands. After that it might be more promising to go for Moulmein and the landing grounds down the Tenasserim coast to Tavoy. From there our air forces could operate against Bangkok and the air bases north of it, and against enemy shipping in the Gulf of Siam. Land forces operating east from Moulmein would threaten the railway line running forth from Bangkok". A plan of this nature was bold and could yield sufficient dividends, but at the moment resources were not available for a venture like this. Nonetheless, the Joint Planning Staff thinking, at the time, provided a basis for subsequent planning and pointed the direction of operations to be undertaken for the restoration of British power in Burma.

The Chiefs of Staff in England were also seized of the problem of reopening communications with China for which the recapture of Rangoon was essential. For that purpose they contemplated

two simultaneous operations, one an advance across the India-Burma frontier and the other down the coast from Chittagong, hopping from aerodrome to aerodrome with the ultimate object of establishing fighter forces in the Gwa or Bassein area. To achieve this, control over the Bay of Bengal and air superiority over Southern Burma were required. The Chiefs of Staff in India were in general agreement with this line of action; but immediately owing to a serious lack of resources and the situation in India, nothing better than limited offensive in Upper Burma was feasible. However, the War Cabinet in England assured the Commander-in-Chief in India of "support with resolution", for it was keen that war on a large scale should be launched against Japan in the Burma theatre. This encouragement whipped up optimism in the India Command which was reflected in the trend of planning during the monsoon months. Its direction was of a two-fold offensive action in Upper Burma and on the Arakan coast. A number of operations were planned which were given various code names. The two most important were 'Ambulance' for operations against Upper Burma and 'Probation' for those in Arakan directed against Akyab. Meanwhile the problem of Chinese cooperation was also being discussed. As a result of all these, the Commander-in-Chief was able to point out on 16 November 1942, the existence of three plans on which work was in progress. The first of these related to the reoccupation of Burma by an advance of British-Indian troops to the Chindwin and beyond simultaneously with the operations by the Chinese forces along the Ledo-Hukawng Valley route, from India, and from Yunnan. The second involved a seaborne expedition against Rangoon, which in the situation of the moment was at best a long term plan. The third aimed at the capture of Akyab to be used as an advanced air base for attacking Japanese aerodromes. The timing for these operations was fixed as 15 February 1943 for the assault on Akyab, and 1 and 15 March, respectively, for the Chinese and IV Corps operations in Upper Burma. Subsequent thinking was more realistic and was based on the full appreciation of the existing inadequacies. It was clear that Upper Burma could not be occupied in the dry season of 1942-43, and the Commander-in-Chief made no secret of his inability either to concentrate the Chinese force at Ledo or help effectively the Chinese offensive from Yunnan by sending his troops beyond the Chindwin. Thus, except for local raids towards the Chindwin no action was undertaken in Upper Burma and the India Command does not appear to have had any interest in it either, as the operations in that region were intended to open the route to help China.

In the winter of 1942-43, therefore, the only serious endeavour made was in Arakan as the seaborne expedition against Sumatra or

Lower Burma was impracticable. However, there were offensive patrols in the Kabaw valley, and the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, known as Wingate Force, was used as a Long Range Penetration Group operating behind the Japanese lines to disrupt communications. This force spent nearly four months there and, though it suffered heavy losses, succeeded in gaining valuable experience. The utility of such a force is only in collaboration with an offensive in full strength. The Chindits were expected to operate simultaneously with the IV Corps offensive along the Chindwin, but as that operation could not materialise, the Long Range Penetration Group lost its *raison d'être* and, in consequence, suffered losses without effecting any substantial success. None the less, the project marked considerable progress in military thinking in India which had tended to be static. The repetition of such a force in the year following brought better results and was fruitful in hastening the defeat of the Japanese. For the moment at least, till the end of the monsoon of 1943, no offensive action was launched and a process of planning started again to commence operations in the cold weather of 1943-44.

The Japanese were fairly well entrenched in Burma where they had considerable land and air forces to the tune of eight divisions and three hundred aircraft, and these were capable of expansion without difficulty to the limit of maintenance capacity. Besides they had a large naval force at Singapore for being employed in Burmese waters. Their morale was high and, unless involved in a war with Russia, the Japanese had no trouble in directing their resources and attention to repulse any Allied attempt at the reconquest of Burma. Nevertheless, any serious alteration in the balance of war in Europe was bound to affect the Japanese will and stubbornness to fight in South-East Asia, and there were unmistakable indications that Germany and Italy would suffer reverses in the year following. In the Pacific region also pressure was increasing on the Japanese forces and their losses were mounting. In that situation it was evident that the relative strength of the two parties would alter as, with the expulsion of the Axis Powers from the field in Europe, the military resources of England and the United States would be released for defeating Japan, whose military power was gradually waning.

The Planning Staff in India drew up plans on that assumption and came to the conclusion that not till November 1943 would it be possible to undertake major operations for the recapture of Rangoon and opening communications with Upper Burma. The main drawback was the undeveloped state of communications as road construction to connect India with Burma had not made adequate progress. The object of planning, none the less, was

the re-occupation of Burma in one campaigning season, and that involved simultaneous advance in Upper Burma, Lower Burma and against Rangoon together with preliminary naval and air operations. A venture of this nature might be feasible if Rangoon was taken which would definitely open easy communications and permit of the maintenance of large forces in Burma. The easiest mode of achieving this result was a seaborne expedition with a land force of three divisions, with adequate air cover, and Bassein, Moulmein and Rangoon as disembarkation points. Interrupting the sea lines of communication of the Japanese was a preliminary to this step, but there were neither forward bases for surface forces to operate, nor adequate strength of submarines and aircraft was available to attack shipping or mine the approaches to the port of Rangoon. Yet nearly 40 squadrons of aircraft would be available for whose operation landing grounds had to be provided on the Arakan coast. Operations in both Upper and Lower Burma were envisaged largely with the object of opening communications and were directed, in the north, to converge in the area Mandalay-Thazi-Pakokku and, in the south, to capture Rangoon, and, as a step towards that, the occupation of Akyab, Ramree Island, Kyaukpyu, Taungup and Bassein. On these lines the Outline Plan was framed and provided for an advance in Upper Burma by the Indian forces from Imphal and the Chinese forces from Yunnan on the Mandalay area, and the swooping down of another Chinese force from Ledo and Paoshan on Myitkyina and Bhamo. In Lower Burma, the operations were to adopt the form of simultaneous landing at Kyaukpyu, Sandoway, Gwa and west of Bassein with the object of capturing airfields there, landing at Taungup, opening of Bassein port and advance therefrom with one division towards Rangoon and, finally to mount an assault by air-borne troops and from the sea on Rangoon. A force of twelve divisions, six in the north and another six in the south, was required if Burma was to be re-occupied in one dry season.

This 'bold and hazardous operation' was generally accepted at the Casablanca Conference and that of American, British, Chinese and Indian officials. The Plan had largely followed the policy decided upon in the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, where precedence was given to the defeat of Germany. The Combined Chiefs of Staff and President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill had agreed to mount attack for the capture of Rangoon and undertake the operations preliminary thereto, involving the capture of Akyab and limited advance from Assam across the Chindwin into Upper Burma. The object of the Plan (known as Anakim) was to facilitate air transport to China and ultimately open the route to that country. These operations were to begin in November 1943, but the War Cabinet in the United Kingdom

did not visualize the possibility of the capture of Rangoons in one dry season and ruled out the seaborne and land attack on it. They had also reduced the weight and extent of operations elsewhere and, owing to the paucity of resources, desired the winter action to be largely for morale purposes. In their reasoning, Burma occupied a minor position for they felt that Japan could be knocked out of the war mainly by operations in the Pacific or from the Russian mainland. From their viewpoint, and quite in contrast with that of the India Command, the reconquest of the whole of Burma was not essential militarily for the defeat of Japan. Hence the War Cabinet desired limited operations to secure Myitkyina. The pressure of war in Europe and the inability to provide the necessary resources for an operation of the magnitude planned for Burma were the excuse for limiting the extent of effort in the east.

Apart from the inadequacy of war equipment, the division in American thinking between the Chennault and Stilwell groups was also responsible for a policy of limited action. The Chinese support, on which "Anakim" was largely based, did not seem to materialise. The Chinese forces in Yunnan had not been prepared for a major operation. Chennault stood for increase in air power in China to harass the Japanese and emphasised the importance of the air lift of equipment towards that end. Stilwell had pinned his faith on building up the land forces in China and employing them in a big way in Upper Burma. He stressed therefore the need of early construction of roads in Upper Burma and transporting bulky road building equipment and arms for the army. The existing means of transport were wholly insufficient for the purpose. His demand for the regeneration of the Chinese forces and expeditious construction of a road from India to connect with the Burma Road, came thus into conflict with Chennault's schemes, and in the process Chinese theatre was not fully developed to throw its weight in the scales of war. The Washington Conference, in May 1943, gave priority in supplies for Chennault, to the great dissatisfaction of Stilwell. But the most important decision of this meeting was the postponement of the Outline Plan or Anakim on the advice of Wavell and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, because of the fall in the delivery of supplies which were unlikely to be completed before the monsoon. The Washington Conference, however, had determined priorities and outlined the scope of operations for the India Command. The basic object was to maintain unremitting pressure against the Japanese and to render utmost support to China to keep her in the war. The latter was to be done by increasing air transport to Chungking, and all operations in Burma were conditioned by this purpose.

There was change in the India Command in June 1943 and General Claude Auchinleck was appointed the Commander-in-LINCHS/65—15

Chief. He reviewed the position and plans were prepared on the principle that depth of advance must be governed by "maintenance position and this by construction of all-weather roads." On this basis the plans for 1943-44 were (1) offensive operations by the Chinese forces from Yunnan with the object of destroying maximum of Japanese forces, (2) advance by Chinese forces from Ledo towards Myitkyina, (3) offensive operations by a force of three British-Indian divisions and the Long Range Penetration Group brigade with the object of pushing forward the road to Sittaung and Kalembo from Assam and maintaining forces there to cover the road-head during the monsoon, and (4) operations in Arakan for the capture of Akyab. The Planning Staff laid great stress on the last because, owing to the limitations of the Assam line of communications, operations in Upper Burma were not likely to make much headway and in the interest of prestige and morale Akyab must be captured. But owing to floods in Bihar and Orissa and the priority accorded to the support of China and air development towards that object, the Eastern Army preferred limited offensive in Arakan and holding-up operations on the Assam front. The Arakan operations were to have priority. The modest character of new planning was occasioned by the reduced supplies from the United Kingdom, the inability to release seacraft from the Middle East, the Indian reverses at Buthidaung in Arakan operations and the consequent decline in morale as well as the British apprehensions about the loyalty of Indian troops in view of the mounting propaganda offensive by the Japanese and the Indian National Army. Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State, feared that the morale of Indian army might be affected by the Japanese subversive activities, the economic conditions in India and the political movement in the country. A Committee was appointed to review the position and it was found that the 'milking' of the older regiments had considerably weakened the force and that new recruitment was not of the requisite standard. Also an impression had grown of the invincibility of the Japanese army, causing in the Indian army the tendency towards precaution for protection before the need to take offensive. Lack of training in jungle warfare and inadequate equipment for fighting in that terrain were other factors for the weakness of the infantry. But the political factor was the one which alarmed the Prime Minister most, and he ordered suspension of expansion of the Indian army. However, this phase did not last long, but it affected the nature of planning in the summer of 1943.

The Quebec or Quadrant Conference met in August 1943 and laid the basis of future planning and operations in South East Asia. Apart from the formation of a separate South East Asia Command with Lord Louis Mountbatten as the Supreme Commander, this Conference considered the plan set by the India Command and



another, known as Culverin, which had brewed for some time under the influence of Churchill and Wavell, and aimed at the capture of Sumatra by amphibious operations and cutting the Japanese route of supplies and nibbling the periphery of their occupation in South East Asia. Churchill had laid great store on this quick method of destroying the Japanese power. It had not met with support from the Chiefs of Staff and found a short shrift at Quebec. The American Chiefs of Staff insisted on the re-opening of the road to China and stressed the need for the recapture of the whole of Burma and, therefore, advocated offensive operations in Upper Burma as well as the capture of Akyab and Ramree Island in the dry weather of 1943-44. They did not favour any diversion in Sumatra. Ultimately it was decided that the capture of Burma should have priority. The plan for 1943-44 was "to carry out operations for the capture of northern Burma in order to improve the air route and establish overland communications with China," "to continue preparations for an amphibious operation, for the capture of Akyab and Ramree," "to continue the preparation of India as a base for the operations eventually contemplated in the South East Asian theatre", and "finally to continue to build up and increase the air lift to China". These were the objectives for the new Command to be set up which came into being in November 1943. With that the India Command was divested of its responsibility to plan for operations in Burma, though the continuity of planning was not lost.

The operations in Burma, it was fully known, could not force Japan to own defeat, which must come by an invasion of the homeland rather than beating her on the periphery. The reconquest of the land mass bordering on the south-west Pacific or the capture of strategic islands in the south or central Pacific had their value in affording near air and naval bases for striking on the Japanese mainland. The reoccupation of the Philippines might also have the same effect. Burma and Malaya were on the flanks of the Japanese extended periphery and must have fallen in case of pressure on the centre. Hence in the strategy of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Burmese Theatre acquired a low value and had importance only as the venue for the supply of war material to China. But for operations of the magnitude involved in a direct assault on Japan, resources were not available at the moment and ships and landing craft could not be assembled in a strength adequate for the purpose. None the less, Japan was not to be left to itself and must be engaged in Burma where invasion, even though of a limited capacity, might be launched. In this strategic context alone were the plans for attack on Burma considered; and there, too, as the existing communications and build-up of forces were not sufficient to mount a decisive attack in Upper Burma, Arakan

coast, which had a mere subsidiary significance, was chosen for the initiation of active warfare. Up to the combat season of 1944, apart from frontier skirmishes on the Assam border in the direction of Tamu, the only fighting conducted was in Arakan. But the Arakan operations could acquire value only in conjunction with the move from Assam towards the Chindwin. As the latter failed to materialise and thus divert the weight of Japanese counter-offensive, the advance down the Arakan coast lost its sting and had little prospect of success either.

The first operations in Arakan were commenced by the 14th Indian Division in December 1942 and had as their objective the capture of Donbaik-Buthidaung area and the move down to Akyab. But this offensive action fizzled out as the Indian troops were unable to pierce through the Japanese defensive positions and were compelled to return to their starting points, and their lines of communication were disorganised by a strong counter-offensive by the hostile forces. In this operation were revealed the weaknesses in training and tactics of jungle warfare. This lack was sought to be made good by an intensive training during the monsoon months.

Initially, owing to the paucity of resources, the 1942-43 campaign had a defensive aspect about it, for though Akyab remained the ultimate object, holding of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line and preventing Japanese incursions into the Chittagong area was the all-absorbing interest. The danger of the invasion of India landward had also not yet been eliminated. Moreover, the expected mobilisation of forces in the central or Assam sector had not materialised, in the absence of which advance down the Arakan coast had lost all meaning. In the northern sector during this period, the 23rd Indian Division had been concentrated on the Assam frontier more for the purpose of keeping a watch on the Japanese build-up and patrolling the border Chin Hill area. It did not have adequate strength to undertake offensive operations, but carried out its assignment of preventing sudden and surreptitious encroachments by the Japanese into Indian territory.

Another activity which attracted considerable attention was the launching of the first Long Range Penetration Group, the 77th Brigade, into Burma under the command of Brigadier Wingate. Field-Marshal Wavell called it "a great adventure" and expected considerable strategic advantage to accrue from it. The main purpose of such a venture was to harass the Japanese line of communication by penetrating occupied Burma to a depth of some 200 to 300 miles in the rear of the Japanese forward positions. Its role was purely offensive, relying on "mobility, concealment and unpredictable movement to achieve surprise and avoid destruction."

The force was intended to keep within the occupied area for three to four months and was to be supplied by the air force droppings of stores, and might even subsist on the land. That the operation was difficult and hazardous was admitted by the planners and the commanders, and therefore a picked force was selected for this assignment. The value of such an enterprise was only in combination with a major offensive operation launched from the bases in Assam, in the absence of which the step might become merely suicidal. The theory underlying Long Range Penetration was neither new nor unsound for what it aimed at was disruption of enemy's communications and weakening his morale by adopting the element of surprise. But generally such operations had been on a small scale, even in North Africa and elsewhere in Europe where they had been practised during the Second World War. The novelty of Wingate's enterprise was the employment of a large force, consisting of a brigade or more, and the period for which it was employed. And because the main Indian attack to which the Chindit operations were pre-eminently subsidiary could not begin, and in its absence the gains expected from them did not materialise; whatever impression had been created was soon obliterated. Also the Japanese were free to deal with this small force and that resulted in avoidable losses, tremendous in their nature. At the outset doubts were expressed of the utility and opportuneness of the enterprise, and in January 1943 there was even the possibility of its being countermanded because of the unpreparedness of the Chinese forces in Yunnan and the British Indian forces in Assam to begin their attack in Upper Burma. But Wingate did not wish to damp the spirits of his troops which had been trained for the operation and whose expectations had reached a high pitch. Hence the expedition was launched on 8 February 1943 more to gain experience and test the validity of the Long Range Penetration plan as also to win the loyalty and friendly support of the Kachin and other tribes.

It is not necessary here to describe the activities of the 77th Brigade or Wingate's Chindits, as the force was generally called. It will be sufficient to mention that against all odds the force moved into the interior of Upper Burma, crossed the river Irrawaddy, cut the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway and fought certain actions with the Japanese. It had been detected and the Japanese had reacted strongly. Air supplies and wireless communications on which the success of the enterprise mainly depended, had failed and the Group was put to extreme hardships for lack of adequate supplies in a hostile region. The return of the troops was hotly contested and the force when it reached the Indian soil was disrupted and had suffered great privations and loss. But the achievements of this first expedition, though by no means spectacular,

were not insignificant. Wingate claimed "complete success" for his enterprise, and though one may not agree with him, it will be correct to state that some useful gains were made. The railway line was put out of commission for nearly a month thereby compelling the Japanese to use the longer and more limited river and road communications to Bhamo. The Chindits gathered valuable information of topography and the people in Japanese occupied Burma. They had also succeeded in directing the Royal Air Force bombing operations against Japanese concentrations. Nearly eight battalions of Japanese troops were also tied up in North Burma to deal with this force; and by these means Wingate succeeded in preventing hostile infiltration across the Chindwin towards Assam and in loosening the Japanese grip on the Kachin levies north of Myitkyina.

None the less, it will be true to say that the strategic value of this campaign was negligible, and that was natural in the absence of the main Allied offensive, of which the Chindits were merely the spearhead. It had carried out the preparatory work for the offensive, but that did not come, which has made one writer compare it with "an engine without a train". The Japanese regarded it as having only a nuisance value. But even at a high cost, the campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of mobile columns to penetrate behind the enemy lines, and the relative failure of the expedition paved the way for a more successful operation next year.

In November 1943 the South East Asia Command started functioning and took over the control of operations and their planning in that theatre from the India Command. The latter was now largely employed in maintaining the traditional defences of India, its internal security and transforming the country into a base for nearly twenty-five divisions, 184 air squadrons and naval fleets for operations in Asia. The Allied position had considerably improved in the interval and the situation did not look so gloomy as one year previously. The war in the west was developing against the Fascist forces. The Russians had recovered from the first blow and the tide of German invasion had been turned back. The Soviet armies had now started grinding their way slowly towards Germany. Italian forces had been decisively defeated in Africa and Mussolini's African empire was a dead dream. The German counter-attacks in Northern Africa had failed to contain the Anglo-American advance, which had succeeded in expelling out of Africa all traces of Nazi or Fascist influence. The Allied forces had invaded Italy where they were fighting against stubborn German resistance and proceeding step by step up the Italian peninsula to occupy Rome and use Northern Italy as a base for mounting air and land attack on the heart of

Germany. There was optimism everywhere in the Allied camp, and British and American forces were concentrating in Great Britain for the invasion of France across the Channel. The Germans were being squeezed from three sides, but the game was not yet wholly lost for them.

"In the east, the Japanese had shot their bolt", and were on the defensive now. The war in the Pacific had gathered momentum and was wearying out the Japanese and decimating their air and naval forces. The American forces were organised for the recapture of the Philippines which would open the way for the conquest of the Ryukyu Islands and then the invasion of the Japanese mainland. In Burma and Malaya the Japanese were content to maintain the *status quo* and no great build-up of armed forces was in evidence there. Nevertheless they were intent on preventing the reopening of land communications to China and even to stop the air ferry from Assam. As against this, the Allied strategy, as determined by the Trident and Quadrant Conferences, was to open such communications to China either by invading the whole of Burma or merely through the Ledo Road. The urgency of this measure was fully realised and the SEAC was formed to plan for its achievement, which in the process involved the reconquest of Burma for which resources were being built. The general position in the matter of troops and supplies had greatly improved and the prospect was that with the turn for the better in the war in Europe more and more forces and equipment would be diverted to India for action in South East Asia. The naval adventure of striking against Sumatra was dead, and the entire concentration had to be on war in Burma for which firm planning was undertaken.

The earlier plan known as Anakim had to be dropped because of its ambitious proportions at a time when resources were unavailable. When the SEAC was formed the situation was none too bright but the prospects for the future were hopeful. The Japanese had seven divisions in Burma besides their forces in Malaya on which they could draw to the extent of three or four divisions. As against this the British had six divisions besides six short Chinese divisions. In the air the relative British strength numerically was higher with their more than 500 aircraft as against the three hundred of the Japanese but whose fighters were superior. There was promise of better and more aircraft for the British, and in India more troops were being raised and trained for jungle warfare. Besides, the Long Range Penetration Group was being once again groomed by Wingate to perform a major role in Burmese fighting. Every endeavour was made to provide immunity against malaria and other diseases and thus reduce the sick rate which had been

immensely high. Morale was also sought to be built up. Thus the pre-disposing conditions for a major effort to defeat the Japanese were emerging. But there was no settlement about the plan of operations or the direction of attack. The interests and objectives of the four major Allies, Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek, did not proceed on a single path, and it was difficult to reconcile them as far as the immediate trend the operations might adopt. With the insistence of Stalin for an early invasion of the French coast, American emphasis on Pacific operations and Chiang Kai-shek's demand for the raising of supplies to China, the demands of offensive in South East Asia and their plans for amphibious operations met with little support. The prospect of any major flow of supplies and equipment to this theatre was remote, till Germany had been defeated. Stalin had definitely declined to take to offensive against Japan in Northern Pacific, and that made the Central Pacific and South East Asian operations more urgent, if Japan were to be weakened and the deck cleared for its eventual invasion. Yet no all-out action was practicable in Burma, though a land attack and limited naval operations on the flanks became a necessity. But, as a result of the Sextant Conferences, a limited strategy for Burma was conceived for 1944 and action was taken accordingly.

The India Command had contemplated a sevenfold operation in September 1943 and that had appealed to Lord Louis Mountbatten also. This comprised a sea-borne operation to recapture the Andaman Islands, advance with one Corps along the Arakan coast leading to the occupation of Akyab, advance with one Corps across the Chindwin, the move of the Chinese forces to Bhamo and Lashio, operations of Wingate's Group behind the Japanese lines and airborne operations for the capture of Indaw on the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway. All these did not meet with the favour of the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the Teheran and Cairo Conferences. Ultimately, however, it was decided to undertake a reduced programme in 1944 which consisted of a limited offensive in Arakan with the XVth Indian Corps to clear the coast and the Mayu Range (operation Cudgel) and to mount an advance with the IVth Corps on the central front to advance up to Kalemyo and Kalewa on the Chindwin. The Chinese forces of Stilwell were to move down simultaneously from Ledo to Mogaung and Myitkyina area. This was the initial task of the South East Asia Command, on the success of which was to depend the subsequent conquest of the whole of Burma, by land, air and naval action.

The offensive in Arakan began on 1 December, the troops comprising 7th and 5th Indian Divisions and the 81st West African

Division. For the first month instructions were to maintain close contact with the Japanese positions on the general line Maungdaw-Razabil-Letwedet and thence to the east of the mountains beyond Karapanzin. Lack of communications had been responsible for the debacle in the earlier campaign, hence a comprehensive programme of laying new tracks and improving roads and constructing bridges etc. was taken up by the Indian engineers. The month of December was uneventful and all that occurred was a steady advance up to the crest of the Mayu Range and movement into the Kalapanzin valley. The Japanese had kept largely on the defensive. For January, the plan was to attack the main Japanese positions, "to secure the mouth of the Naaf River—Maungdaw-Buthidaung and exploit success to the maximum". The immediate objective was to obtain the jumping off places, and a serious step was taken to encircle Japanese posts, harass them and capture their forward positions. Within a month some progress had been made and the axis of advance of the Indian Corps had shifted to the east of the Mayu Range. Meanwhile, symptoms of a Japanese counter-offensive were visible and when the stage was set for an all-out attack on them, they struck and their counter-attack began in strength. Meanwhile, up in the north, along the central front from Assam, the IVth Indian Corps had commenced preliminary operations for a move up to the Chindwin. The fighting there developed in two sectors, the Tiddim and Tamu sectors. In the former the 17th Indian Division made some advance but was unable to close round Kalembo. However, it did not fail to make some impression on the opposing forces by its patrols which inflicted some loss on the Japanese ranks. If no success came to the Indian division, the Japanese also failed to pin down the Indian troops or prevent their withdrawal subsequently when they mounted a major offensive against Imphal. In the Tamu sector, the 20th Indian Division was more fortunate and captured Kyaukchaw but then its advance southwards to Dathwekyauk Auk was checked and its troops were besieged near milestone 25, where they formed themselves into a 'box'. Its patrol activities had been impressive and gained timely information of the Japanese build-up for an intended invasion of India and offensive against the Fourteenth Army.

The Japanese had not been inactive all this time. They had been silently preparing for a major attack in two sectors, against Chittagong in the south and Kohima-Imphal in the north, the two bases or advance-heads for the British-Indian offensive operations in Burma. Whether a naval landing on the Bengal coast was to synchronise with land advance is not known. But their object was clear : to disrupt the communications of the Fourteenth Army in Bengal and Assam and, by securing a foothold on the Indian soil, to create panic in the country and thereby sufficiently deflate war

efforts, particularly in the industrial field. The Japanese plan was to split open "the British front, sealing off the eastern from the western half, and cutting the lines of communication of both. Each sector was then to be destroyed separately, and the roads through Chittagong and Dimapur laid open to the Japanese Army." The offensive was their strong reaction to the assembling of Allied troops in Assam behind the Imphal screen and the growing air activity for Chinese assistance. In its form it was a powerful counter-attack to strangle the Indian offensive before it could materialise or gather adequate strength. It was a gamble worth taking and the operations were taken up simultaneously in both the sectors. Lord Louis Mountbatten, however, was not daunted by this show of aggression. His reaction was optimistic. He subsequently wrote, "the Japanese High Command played into our hands, at this point, by staging an all-out offensive. This had the double advantage of drawing the enemy forces in the direction we wished, at an earlier stage than an advance by IV Corps could have done, and of drawing them away from the NCAC front in far greater number than IV Corps would have managed to do. It was most fortunate that at this stage the enemy should choose to fight us on our own ground near our own bases, in the only areas where our existing lines of communication could adequately support us in a large-scale campaign, and where our air bases were sufficiently near the front to enable our supply to be undertaken". But this assessment seemed too optimistic at times when the situation proved "extremely dangerous".

Nevertheless the timing of the Japanese offensive was against them. By this time the British had gained comparative air superiority in Burma and the prospects of reinforcement were not gloomy. Of course the political situation in the country had not cleared yet, but the earlier crises had passed off and, with the departure of Lord Linlithgow and the mounting temper of Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League in favour of the partition of the country, the chances of any general outburst of a mass movement were feeble. The main political parties had made no secret of their abhorrence for foreign invasion as a means of the nation's deliverance. Therefore the new Japanese move could not be motivated by the desire to initiate an armed revolt in the country as an accompaniment of their advance across the frontier. The absence of any simultaneous landings on the eastern coast would strengthen this view. Hence the only explanation of the Kohima incident may be the gaining of local advantage to defeat the projected offensive in Burma before it materialised. Kohima-Imphal area was the main base of operations and then hummed with activity for mounting the invasion. The Japanese were aware of their relative inferiority in the air, and also were unable to extricate any large forces for



action in Burma from the growing pressure and the closing of the ring against them in the Central Pacific. Germany had failed to pierce through the Allied armour in West Asia and the adventure in Russia had brought disaster in its wake. The possibility of the pincer movement developing from two directions against India had passed off earlier, and Japan alone was not capable of conquering India in 1944. Hence the new invasion of the Indian frontier could not have any other major purpose than of a local counter-offensive measure to prevent or delay considerably the commencement of British-Indian advance on Burma which the Japanese were not then in a position to counteract successfully. Of course, the success of their initial operations might have been exploited for further advance into the interior.

The Japanese counter-offensive developed in two phases separately in the two sectors. It began first in Arakan where the plan was to encircle and destroy the isolated divisions of the XVth Indian Corps. This operation was to be carried out by three forces, the Tanahashi, the Koba and the Doi, the spearhead of attack being the first, which was to move between the flanks of the 7th Indian Division and the 81st West African Division in that region, take Taung Bazaar from the rear and then, cutting the Ngakyedauk Pass, trap the 7th Indian Division to the east of the Mayu Range. The Koba Force was to cut the Bawli Road and the third, the Doi Force, was to attack from the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line. This manoeuvre was intended to encircle the 7th Indian Division, separate it from the 5th Indian Division and cut them off from the Corps Headquarters, thereby intercepting the line of supply. As a result, the Japanese assumed that the 7th Indian Division would be compelled to escape across the Mayu Range where it might be destroyed and completely disintegrated. The 5th Indian Division might meet the same fate when it was compelled by the combined attack of the three Japanese forces to move west across the Naaf river. These operations were to be intensively supported by air force.

The plan was a bold one and secretly developed, and posed a serious threat to the Indian army. The attack began early in February and proceeded well up to a certain stage, when after the capture of Taung Bazaar, the Tanahashi Force overran the Headquarters of the 7th Indian Division and the Doi Force had isolated the 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade from its division. But the Koba Force failed to make any serious impression and was driven back to the hills initially and contained there. The reaction of the Indian command to the sudden danger, however, was quick and determined. The 7th Indian Division formed itself into "boxes" resolved not to retreat but to force the siege and be cut to pieces

if the worst came to the worst. One of these was the 'Administrative Box' which held the Corps and Divisional administrative troops, only a few hundred in strength, in the beginning, swelling to some thousands when other troops joined them. With this new reorganisation of the force, which was to be supplied by air and was to meet the Japanese onslaught, the 'battle of the boxes' commenced, and when the peak of the hostile attack had exhausted itself, the initiative passed to the Indian army. It was a grim battle which exhibited the courage, steadfastness and determination of the Indian forces. Their success in escaping extermination was a triumph of morale and an exhibition of the value of air supply. The Allied superiority in the skies was an important factor in the defeat of the Japanese counter-offensive, so also was their inability to vanquish the 5th Indian Division. The tactics of 'box' defence was vindicated. The attack having disintegrated, the XV Indian Corps soon began to chase the Japanese troops back and, even before the Kohima siege had been raised, the rolling back of the Japanese forces had commenced in Arakan.

In the north, the Japanese action came slightly later, but preparations for it had been made much earlier. The immediate object was the capture of Kohima-Imphal area which was of immense strategic importance, both as a base for further operations into the Indian territories and for frustrating Allied advance into Burma before it might materialize. The Japanese Imperial Headquarters had been pressed, since 1942, by some military commanders and the leaders of the Indian National Army to occupy Imphal as a preliminary to the invasion of India, but their appeals went unheeded. At the close of 1943, however, an offensive operation was planned more to counteract the British Indian moves and prevent the mounting of the invasion of Burma. The plan finally sanctioned was for the initiation of a Blitzkrieg in March and to occupy Imphal and Kohima, after which the Japanese Fifteenth Army was to "go over to the defensive". The Arakan counter-offensive was a subsidiary operation more as a diversion to bottle up a large Allied force there and thus prevent reinforcements for the IV Corps from that side. The South East Asia Command was aware of the Japanese preparations and therefore was not taken by surprise. The IV Corps, consequently, developed its defensive planning which was directed at holding to Kohima-Imphal area, and withdrawing the forward troops into it when the threat developed so as to reduce the line of communications. The forces in the Imphal plain were to be organised into a series of defensive 'boxes', self-contained in every respect for ten days and covering airfields which were to be kept open for supplies and re-inforcements. The Allied appreciation had under-estimated the weight of attack but, in its essentials, defence planning was

fruitfully effective. An important aspect of it was that as soon as the offensive had petered out, the Indian army was to assume the aggressive role and advance into Burma. The strategy of 'box' defence found once again full recognition and the Kohima incident proved the mettle of the Indian forces which, with adequate training and sufficient supplies, were able to fight against heavy odds.

The Japanese invasion began early in March and the 17th Indian Division, then in an advanced position, withdrew inside the fortress and other units were in their predetermined positions. The Indian divisions had reeled back under the blows but had avoided capture or annihilation, and even inflicted losses on the invader. The 17th Indian Division had to withdraw nearly a hundred miles in the Tiddim sector but had reached Imphal defying all road-blocks. The 20th Indian Division, in the Tamu sector, had to surrender its depots at Moreh and Sibong, but it had escaped encirclement and fallen back without disintegration. In the north, however, the Japanese had gained better success when they captured Ukhrul and Jessami and weakened the 50th Para Brigade and 1st Assam Regiment. But in this area also their advance had been delayed for several days at Sangshak, thus enabling the 5th Indian Division and the 2nd British Division to get into Imphal and Dimapur respectively, thereby augmenting the strength of the defenders. The shift of the 5th Indian Division from Arakan to Imphal front was a clear evidence of the air superiority of the Allies. By the end of March, the air fleets were well geared for keeping the besieged garrison in Imphal well supplied, and when the Japanese closed in on it, the defenders had even chances of survival. The Japanese maintained pressure on the garrison and employed both force and propaganda to break the morale of the Indian troops. The Indian National Army was freely used in this adventure; but the Japanese failed to defeat the Indian and British garrison, which stood the siege despite its line of communication being cut, and intense suffering at times and of mounting up losses. There were four Indian divisions and two brigades including one armoured, in the Imphal plain, and the 2nd British Division in Dimapur. The siege of Imphal dragged on till the third week of June when it was broken by the entry of the XXXIII Corps advancing from Dimapur, and the 2nd British Division being joined by the 5th Indian Division which had advanced from the interior to meet the relieving troops. The struggle for Kohima and Imphal, the long siege and relief of the garrison, are a saga of bravery and turning point in the war in the east. The strategy of the defenders was fully vindicated. Their plan of pulling back and defeating the Japanese attacks on the perimeter of Imphal plain had proved successful. The battle was one of annihilation in so far as the object was to inflict maximum of casualties on the attackers. The

Imphal plain remained inviolate and the Japanese forces continued to diminish and their pressure languished. On the contrary, the Indian army was getting reinforcements and, with the fast developing strength in India, the increasing rate of air expansion and the growing relief provided by the rapid weakening of German resistance in Europe, the India and the South East Asia Commands were fresh and strong to switch on to the offensive in Burma even before the siege had been raised. The air force played a vital role in all this, by transporting full divisions and maintaining the supplies of an entire Corps for many weeks. All these factors combined to bring success to the Indian and British troops in Imphal and paved the way for the subsequent reconquest of Burma.

The episode of Japanese attack on Imphal-Kohima had, at best, resulted in temporarily obstructing the preparations for the three-pronged drive into Burma to annihilate Japanese opposition there and opening the route to China, which was to be used ultimately for the long-range air attacks on Japan and the final collapse of the eastern Axis partner. At the Cairo Conference a plan of operations had evolved which was further hammered into shape by the prolonged discussions between the South East Asia Command, British Chiefs of Staff and the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington. The overall objective was stated to be "to force the unconditional surrender of Japan by (i) lowering Japanese ability and will to resist by establishing sea and air blockades, conducting intensive air bombardment and destroying Japanese air and naval strength; (ii) invading and seizing objectives in the industrial heart of Japan". This involved occupation of Formosa and the Mandated Islands in the Central Pacific, the reconquest of the Philippines, strengthening of the Allied naval resources in south-west Pacific; and assistance to China so as to build there bases for long range air raids on the homeland of Japan. The British view also aimed at the seizure of Malaya and reoccupation of Burma by combined operations, but the Americans had assigned to such ventures a rather low place in the overall strategy. Burma alone had some importance in their eye mainly in so far as its occupation might augment the flow of supplies to China by opening the land route and thus obviating absolute reliance on the airlift across the 'Hump'. Also operations in other areas were basically the affair of the naval and air forces and land action would not be a major phase except in Burma, and here alone could the British and Indian forces be employed in a large way to exert pressure on the Japanese. Immediately, as long as Germany had not been completely knocked out of the list, it was impossible to divert considerable naval and air fighting units from the European theatre. Hence, in this intervening period, Burma might be used for a major exhibition of force against Japan, though initially this theatre did not acquire any greater importance than that of pinning down some Japanese

forces there which otherwise might be more effectively employed elsewhere. The American thinking was clear that Japan could be defeated only by taking the war into the home islands. The Pacific islands, the mainland of China and the Russian eastern possessions were the regions from which such pressure might be exerted. Thus the operations in Burma had a diversionary character about them and did not merit any high priority in the matter of supplies of aircraft and equipment.

The end of the Kohima-Imphal siege and the repulse of the Japanese army from there synchronised with three important developments in other theatres. Firstly, Marshal Stalin declared at Teheran that on the conclusion of the German war, the Soviet Union would be prepared to cooperate in defeating Japanese. Secondly, in Europe were launched two major operations, the 'Overlord' leading to the invasion of France through Normandy and the 'Anvil' involving the invasion of southern France in mid-August, for the purpose of using its ports for the landing of larger American forces there. The Italian campaign was also intensified and advance into its northern areas was commenced. Thirdly, the Russians had strengthened their offensive to roll back the Nazi forces from their land, and in the spring and summer of 1944 had taken back Crimea, driven the German forces from a major part of southern Russia and had actually started their drive into Poland, the Baltic states and Roumania. The year 1944 thus saw the beginning of the end of the German military might in Europe and the nearness of the Nazi collapse which was expected not beyond its conclusion. The fast mounting reverses of the two Axis partners in Europe and their imminent destruction had a two-fold influence on the operations in the east. Firstly, the Japanese could not expect any assistance from that quarter and secondly, the end of the war in Europe would release vast quantities of equipment and numerous troops of the Allies to be hurled into the battle in the east. Even Russia would press Japan from the north. In this situation the future was dark for the Japanese Government which had to fight a losing battle and disperse the forces in many areas. The Americans and the British were enabled to direct greater pressure in the Pacific and Burma, and their successes in the Philippines and on the Indian frontier were symbolic of the coming events.

'The stimulus of the Pacific advance' had led the British and American opinion "to improve the time-table in Burma" and the Joint Chiefs of Staff demanded an ambitious campaign. The Americans were prepared "to press the Chinese to advance from Yunnan" and had even in March, "allocated four groups of transport aircraft, of a hundred planes each, to the South-East Asia

Command."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Lord Mountbatten was issued a directive on 3 June 1944, which desired him primarily "to develop, maintain, broaden and protect the air link to China. . . . in support of Pacific operations," but the major emphasis was on action in Burma. This was expressed in the words; "So far as is consistent with the above (develop air link to China) to press advantages against the enemy by exerting maximum effort, ground and air, particularly during the current monsoon season, and in pressing such advantages, to be prepared to exploit the development of overland communications to China. All these operations must be dictated by the forces at present available, or firmly allocated, to S.E.A.C." This was a clear direction for the reconquest of Burma as a whole, which alone could enable the Allies to use the land route to China. Lord Mountbatten understood it as such and planned to exploit the momentum generated by the expulsion of the Japanese forces from Kohima-Imphal to re-occupy Burma by operations in the three regions, north, centre and south. The task was allotted to the 11th Army Group and the Fourteenth Army, which were assured of the cooperation of the Chinese forces in Yunnan under General Stilwell.

The plan was for a three-fold operation in two sectors, north and south. In the north, the Chinese forces were to converge on Bhamo and Lashio, south of Myitkyina, and thereby open the Burma Road besides protecting the left flank of the Fourteenth Army and withdrawing a few Japanese divisions from the main field of battle in central Burma. The major effort was, however, to be made by the two Corps, XXXIII and IV, of the Fourteenth Army, whose objective was primarily to clear the Shwebo plain, cross the Irrawaddy and defeat the main Japanese opposition in the Mandalay-Meiktila area. This battle in central Burma was intended for destroying the Japanese forces and preventing their escape to Siam. But it was clear to General Slim and Lord Mountbatten that without the re-occupation of Rangoon, the two Indian Corps would remain poised in the middle of Burma, 'without any firm surface lines of communications'. Hence, southern Burma had to be conquered from the south, for which an amphibious operation was necessary. But immediately adequate landing craft and air force might not be available owing to the impracticability of their release from the Mediterranean region. This phase of the operation required six divisions including an airborne division and considerable landing craft, which was impossible to obtain until Germany was fully defeated before October. Therefore this part of the plan was initially scrapped, and all that might be achieved was to direct the XV Corps, operating in Arakan, to move down the Mayu peninsula and capture Akyab and Ramree Island, which would be

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2. *Grand Strategy V*, pp. 486-7.

used as air bases to strike against the Japanese bases in south Burma and to rush supplies to the Fourteenth Army in central Burma and in its move southwards for the capture of Rangoon.

The Japanese failure on the perimeter of Imphal in Manipur was soon converted into a rout, and their withdrawal became one series of incessant retreats, so that by 19 August they had been driven across the Indo-Burmese border. The monsoon with all its vehemence did not deter the Indian forces from pursuing the retreating Japanese, but owing to administrative difficulties it was not before November that bridgeheads were established on the Chindwin, and the two Corps were able to enter the Shwebo plain in the next month. It is not necessary here to describe in detail the various stages of the advance eastwards leading to the crossing of the Irrawaddy. The story has been given in the volumes relating to the Reconquest of Burma. It may be sufficient to mention here that the XXXIII Corps and the 19th Indian Division of IV Corps had moved from Ye-U across the railway line towards Thabeikyin and Singu, where bridgeheads were to be established to cross the Irrawaddy, on the route to Mandalay, on which they were to swoop from the north. The Chinese forces and the 36th Division had moved south of Myitkyina towards Katha and, by January, they had occupied Bhamo and opened the Burma Road by connecting it with Ledo, by the famous Ledo Road constructed by the efforts of the American and Indian engineers.

At this stage, General Slim decided on a bold adventure. He knew that the crossing of the Irrawaddy in the north would be hotly contested by the Japanese General Kimura. Therefore, he switched the IV Corps, minus the 19th Indian Division, southwards to Pakokku, a rapid march of nearly 300 miles, to cross the Irrawaddy near Chauk and attack Meiktila, where the Japanese base of supplies was sited, and thus take the Japanese in the rear and push them into the lap of the XXXIII Corps. It was a courageous manoeuvre which was feasible largely owing to air-superiority of the Allies and the possibility of maintaining the fast moving Indian and British troops by air. The diversion was successful and Meiktila fell to the IV Corps. Soon Mandalay was also captured and the Japanese were compelled to accept defeat, for they started retreating across the Salween. The Fourteenth Army then began its rapid advance for the recapture of Rangoon before the advent of the monsoon and block the exit of the Japanese forces beyond Pegu into Siam. Its successes were phenomenal and the opposition was fast dwindling. The Japanese reverses in Yenangyaung and the oil-fields area, as also in Pegu, sealed their fate and liberated Burma. The race for Rangoon continued, but before the IV Corps

could reach the city, it had been occupied by the 26th Indian Division moving from the southern way of sea. That operation was possible owing to the capture of Akyab and Ramree by XV Corps, from where not only was air support afforded to the fast moving troops of IV Corps in their sweep southwards, but also the Indian Division embarked for attack on Rangoon. The Japanese had evacuated Rangoon and there was only token opposition offered to the Indian forces. With the recapture of Rangoon and the river entrance being cleared, Burma was reopened for the United Nations and the despatch of war material to China was facilitated. The Burma Road was once again fully available. The Japanese were soon driven out of Burma and one important sector of their perimeter had caved in.







## CHAPTER X

# The Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region had become an active theatre of operations with the entry of Italy into the war. Mussolini's imperial aspirations had embraced Egypt, Sudan, and Somaliland in the south, Syria, Iraq and Iran in the east, and Albania and Greece in the north; and before the spring of 1941, fighting in some shape or other had broken out in all these areas. But unfortunately for him, his troops had no heart in his ambitious enterprises and his generals proved incompetent. In Asia, anticipatory action taken by the British-Indian army had prevented Iraq, under the leadership of Rashid Ali, from developing into an Italian satellite with the result that the eastern advance of Axis arms and influence had been disrupted. In Africa, within the first year, Fascism had suffered a series of defeats with the consequence that not only had British Somaliland and Sudan escaped annexation, but even the Italian Empire in East Africa had been liquidated. Ethiopia was once again freed from Italian occupation. In North Africa also, the Italians had failed to make any deep impression on Egypt, which had defied their repeated invasions, but even their own possessions in Cyrenaica were not free from danger of invasion and the Fascist empire was collapsing there. Mussolini's enterprise in Albania and Greece had set into motion the process of Axis advance into the Balkans with all its inevitable reactions in the diplomatic sphere, leading to British activities in Turkey and Western Asia and the inevitable emergence of Russia as a partner with the Western Allies in the ultimate mission of crushing the Nazis and the Fascists. The situation was growing adverse for the Italians involving German participation in the Mediterranean fighting to fortify the rapidly waning strength and morale of their Italian ally. By April 1941, when the Indian divisions once again reverted to the Western Desert after their victorious career in East Africa, General Rommel had come to the North African coast with his Afrika Korps and was poised on its borders for the invasion of Egypt. Thus a new element had entered the African stage where the problem for the British was no longer to fight the effete Italian Fascists, but of vanquishing the Germans. A phase of global war had begun.

The situation at the end of April 1941 was that Tobruk, which still continued to be held by the Commonwealth forces, was besieged by the Axis army which had captured Bardia and reached

Sollum on the Egyptian frontier. The British force had retreated to the Western Desert and in Greece they were compelled to leave the country, having met with disaster there. The debacle in Greece was a blessing in disguise, for it made concentration of effort possible in North Africa, which was facilitated further now owing to the Italian reverses in East Africa and the end of opposition in Iraq and Syria. The British Government was thus in a position to send reinforcements, both in men and equipment, to the Middle East Command. By the spring of 1941, Great Britain had survived the Blitzkrieg and its industry had been once again geared to produce tanks, aeroplanes and other war materials in large quantities. The benevolent neutrality of the United States had also started bearing fruit in the shape of growing quantities of war equipment which might be shipped to the Middle East Command. Thus when the 4th Indian Division came back to the Western Desert and its companion division was on its way there, the position of the Middle East Command was not desperate, and in the expectation of being treated generously, could entertain plans of an offensive to defeat the Axis advance and free Egypt for ever from that menace. The Axis position was not weak either in spite of the Italian reverses, but the tide had begun to ebb and the process of the disintegration of its offensive had commenced. The step that led to the conquest of Italy and the ultimate defeat of Germany was taken in the summer of 1941.

The physical configuration of North Africa determined the strategy and character of fighting. The vast desert which embraced the entire hinterland limited the field of operations to the narrow coastal belt in which all the major towns and the military positions lay. To the British the occupation of this coastline was necessary not only to make Egypt safe, but more than that the purpose was to secure the hold over the Mediterranean Sea which alone provided easy means of communication and transport to the east. The continued possession of the southern coastline of the Mediterranean by the Axis Powers effectively neutralised the then possession of Malta, or Cyprus, and gave to the Italian-German High Commands the advantage of not merely using the Mediterranean sea lanes but also of intercepting the British shipping, operating in that area. Hence the primary purpose of British strategy in North Africa was to oust the Fascist-Nazi forces from the coastal area, and occupy the entire length of it up to Bizerta and even Algiers in the west. The occupation of Tunisia would provide a bridgehead for the invasion of Sicily and Italy eventually, thus opening a second or third front for striking against Germany. This strategic value of the North African coast was not unknown to Germany, and though involvements elsewhere did not permit of concentration of Nazi forces there, the German High Command was keen to prevent the westward push of the Allied forces and even to liquidate their

bases in Egypt, which would open mighty prospects of defeating British resistance in the east. The narrow coastal strip defined the character of war as one of rapid movements in which the armoured forces had to play a major role. The addition of 50 I Tanks to the British strength was, therefore, a valuable reinforcement, and Rommel also, on his side, had to depend mainly on his Panzer Divisions, whose relative weakness ultimately decided the fate of war.

In the spring of 1941, Rommel had stopped on the Egyptian frontier, and had failed to break the resistance of the Tobruk garrison. Presumably, the German High Command was averse to extravagant consumption of their limited forces in North Africa at a time when the full Nazi might was to be thrown into the balance against the Soviet Union, and desired Rommel not to commit his forces too deeply or to incur heavy casualties. This may account for his failure to advance further into Egypt. This unexpected behaviour of Rommel encouraged the British Command to plan a series of counter-offensive operations directed towards the expulsion of Nazi forces from North Africa. The first of these was launched in June with the object of clearing the triangle Sollum-Bir Wair-Capuzzo and to drive the Axis beyond Tobruk, almost as a first step in the conquest of Cyrenaica and advance into Libya. The June offensive, however, frittered away and the British-Indian forces were compelled by strong German reaction to fall back on Sidi Barrani. Rommel did not press his advantage, and in the action had disclosed the quality and strength of his armour. The British troops had gained precious experience which stood them in good stead in subsequent operations, and were able to form a stable line of defence. The next few months were devoted to consolidating the position and building up the strength for a new counter-offensive operation. From July to October three successive lines of defence were formed behind the Buq Buq—Sofafi line, which was the most forward position. The three areas of location were known as the Matruh defences, Baqqush Box and the Alamein Box. In this hastily constructed position, General Wavell's Desert Force sought to contain the threatened attack by the Afrika Korps, which did not materialise, and afforded time for the building up of a stronger and more stable defensive line by the Middle East Command. The new position selected was the area circumscribed by the El Alamein railway station one side and the Qattara Depression, a desert sea, on the other. This Alamein Line guarded the bottleneck capable of holding up Axis advance of great strength. This was to be the last ditch for saving Egypt.

In July, General Wavell was relieved by General Auchinleck, who decided to change the whole complexion of warfare by resorting to a resolute counter-offensive, having as its object the capture

of Benghazi with the ultimate purpose of invading Italy. The operations were no longer to be confined to the repairing of the defensive line on the Egyptian frontier and preventing that land from falling into the Axis embrace. The new Commander-in-Chief decided on a bold adventure to clear the entire coastline of the Axis forces. The June offensive, known as 'Battleaxe', was limited in its scope and General Wavell did not envisage any better results than "succeed in driving enemy west of Tobruk" and establishing "land communications with Tobruk". And he was doubtful of achieving even this little success owing to the technical inferiority in armour. He wrote to the Chief of Imperial General Staff, on 28 May 1941, "recent operations have disclosed some disquieting features. Our armoured cars are too lightly armoured to resist the fire of enemy fighter aircraft, and having no guns, are powerless against the German eight-wheeled armoured cars, which have guns and are faster. This makes reconnaissance difficult. Our Infantry tanks are really too slow for a battle in desert, and have been suffering considerable casualties from the fire of the powerful enemy anti-tank guns. Our cruisers have little advantage in power or speed over German medium tanks. Technical breakdowns are still too numerous. We shall not be able to accept battle with perfect confidence in spite of numerical inferiority, as we could against Italians. Above factors may limit our success. They also make it imperative that adequate flow of armoured reinforcements and reserves should be maintained." His successor reaped the fruits of this warning and in the autumn months a constant flow of armoured cars and tanks was maintained and more troops poured into the Western Desert from the other areas to augment the fighting strength of the Middle East Command, and thereby enable it to decide on a bolder adventure. The new armour was better and not inferior to the German machines.

The situation had definitely changed for the better for a decisive offensive action in Cyrenaica. The Russian war had taken a large German force eastward where it was unable to break the mounting resistance of the Soviet armies. British air strikes in Germany were having effect on the industry and morale there. The result was that the German High Command could not adequately reinforce Rommel's Afrika Korps, and thereby the prospects of his resorting to advance eastward were dimmed. The British industrial output had considerably expanded now, and though a large portion was diverted to sustain the fighting strength of the Soviet armies, yet the expectation of greater supplies of war equipment and armour and reinforcements of troops was fast growing. In July, the Chiefs of Staff promised to send additional 150 Cruiser Tanks and 40,000 men to General Auchinleck to enable him to "undertake the offensive in the Western Desert by

the end of September." Prime Minister Churchill was more vehement. He wrote on 19 July 1941, "If we do not use the lull accorded us by the German entanglement in Russia to restore the situation in Cyrenaica the opportunity may never recur. A month has passed since the failure at Sollum, and presumably another may have to pass before a renewed effort is possible. This interval should certainly give plenty of time for training. It would seem justifiable to fight a hard and decisive battle in the Western Desert before the situation changes to our detriment, and to run those major risks without which victory has rarely been gained." The Prime Minister was keen to conclude the African war before Russia cracked under German pressure, which was apprehended as likely, and that too not in the distant future. Marshal Stalin had started pressing for a second front in Western Europe and in the north in the Arctic region. The implementation of this demand would divert attention from North Africa; but Churchill did not have much heart in the Second Front until Africa and the east had been made completely safe as preserves of the British Empire. Hence this insistence for an early offensive in Cyrenaica. Auchinleck did not wish to take any risks without proper reorganisation, reequipment and reinforcement. The earliest date he set for attack was 1 November, and in his visit to the United Kingdom, the outlines of the operation 'Crusader' to mount in November were sketched. On the other side, the German and Italian discussions had proceeded for launching an invasion of Egypt and to capture Tobruk as a preliminary. But the logistic position did not permit of such preparations in September, October or even November. though the Afrika Korps was strong enough to contain any attack from the east.

The British Government had pinned great hopes in Auchinleck's offensive as it opened the way for the invasion of Italy and the re-establishment of full control over the Mediterranean. General Auchinleck had geared the entire war machinery for the purpose, and the British Government was prepared to support him with the necessary reinforcements. His plan was based on the assumption that entire Libya, including both Cyrenaica as well as Tripolitania, would be cleared of the Axis forces in one sweep. The attack and subsequent advance by the Commonwealth forces was directed towards completely eliminating the Axis hold in North Africa, and to occupy Tripoli and convert it into a base for launching the invasion of Italy. This operation called 'Crusader' was to be conducted in two successive phases, depending on success in the first which aimed at the occupation of Cyrenaica and the destruction of the Axis armoured force at the earliest opportunity. The operation was timed to commence in November. Two possible courses for advance were envisaged, one along the coast and the other through the desert. In the second alternative the main

striking force was to be based on Giarabub, which would move through Jalo and strike the Afrika Korps in the rear and capture Benghazi. This operation would involve placing a secondary force on the coast line to prevent Axis advance towards Alexandria and to tie up a part of their troops on the front. If the other course was adopted, the main striking force would move along the coast to impose a direct attack towards Tobruk, while a secondary force would be employed to advance across the desert so that the Axis force was divided and dispersed. Plans were to be prepared by the Eighth Army for either course to be adopted. The Eighth Army, under General Cunningham, was to consist of two corps (XIII and XXX), the Oasis Force and a reserve column. This comprised one armoured division, one armoured brigade group, four infantry divisions, two infantry brigades and one army tank brigade. The 4th Indian Division and 29th Indian Infantry Brigade were to form part of the Army.

In the detailed planning, General Cunningham preferred, for various reasons, to attack along the coast in the direction of Tobruk, and his immediate object was to destroy the Axis armour and relieve the siege of Tobruk. What he planned to do was to move his armoured force along a wide detour and tempt the Panzer Divisions, then established between Bardia and Tobruk, to leave their ground and fight the British armour which had a numerical superiority. When the Panzer force had been defeated, the motorised division was to move on Tobruk and be joined by the garrison there. The role of the infantry was to contain the Axis forces in the frontier area. Preparations were made to implement this plan, and the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force participated in preparing the ground for the impending offensive by a series of bombardments.

The attack began on 18 November with the armour of XXX Corps adopting the lead. The other Corps of which the 4th Indian Division was a part was to commence its operations later when the Axis armour had been relatively battered. It is not intended here to give any detailed account of the warfare which is narrated in the volume dealing with the North African operations. It may suffice to mention that the first push by the mobile XXX Corps faced strong resistance by the Panzer Division and was not able to liquidate opposition in Sidi Razegh by 22 November, when XIII Corps was scheduled to commence its operations. The Axis armour had not been crippled, yet under some misapprehension the XIII Corps, which was mainly composed of infantry, was ordered to operate on the two Omars. The 4th Indian Division was successful in capturing them by 22 November and thereby set into motion the process of advance which ultimately culminated in the capture of Benghazi. But immediately on 23 November, a stalemate had occurred and

General Cunningham grew apprehensive of the safety of Egypt. This led to a change in the command, his place being taken by his Deputy, General Ritchie, for General Auchinleck decided on pushing forth the offensive irrespective of the losses in tanks. The decision was bold but lucky, for the Germans had not been strained less. The second wave of attack on Sidi Razegh began on 25 November, but it was clear in the next few days that this feature was not easily palpable to attack. Hence General Ritchie switched on to another plan, namely that of taking EI Adem by a preliminary attack on Bir el Gubi. This place had great strategic value and a demonstration against it would bring the Axis armour into the open where it might be easily defeated.

The 4th Indian Division had been attached to XXX Corps, and the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade was allotted the task of capturing Bir el Gubi, which when completed facilitated the capture of EI Adem; and by 5 December the Axis had decided to withdraw. The pursuit was taken by the 4th Indian Division and the 7th Armoured Division which, despite supply difficulties and the rapid pace of advance, were in a position to capture Benghazi on 24 December 1941. Meanwhile General Rommel had entrenched his forces in EI Agheila with the forward screen at Agadabia, in a last ditch attempt to preserve Tripolitania and thereby save a foothold for the Axis in North Africa. He had also left some of his troops eastwards on the Egyptian frontier. The task for the Eighth Army was to repulse Rommel and force him to evacuate the stronghold of EI Agheila. This was to be preliminary to a determined advance westwards to clear the whole of Libya. But the Eighth Army was scarcely in a position to adopt a fresh offensive move, for the force which had reached Benghazi was not adequate to assume the dual role of breaking the opposition at EI Agheila and pursuing the Axis forces into Libya to occupy the whole region. The 4th Indian Division had suffered considerable losses, so also was the case with the 7th Armoured Division. General Auchinleck had not the resources to push in adequate reinforcements, and the supply line had not been built up. Rommel's stand was a determined one, and the consequence was that not only had the XIII Corps offensive frittered away, but it had to leave Benghazi and fall back on the tactics of an orderly withdrawal. The withdrawal continued without being redeemed by any major successful counter-offensive. In consequence, not only was the entire ground lost, but Tobruk also fell to Rommel, whose forces were once again poised on the Egyptian frontier, threatening to demolish the entire defensive arrangements of the Eighth Army. In that predicament, General Ritchie decided to retreat to Matruh, where some defences were available, and it was then that the famous Alamein Line was constructed to contain the Axis offensive. Alamein proved to be a turning point and the



scene of the mighty victories of the Allies which brought an end to the Axis hold on Africa.

The decision to fall back on Matruh was taken after some indecision; but the task was now two-fold for the Eighth Army. First it had to delay the Axis advance and secondly it was to construct a defensive position there. The two Corps were set on the two tasks, respectively. A third Corps (X Corps) was to join it soon and then the XXX Corps was to retire to EI Alamein where additional defences were to be built. The position, however, deteriorated and, by 23 June 1942, it was clear that the Axis advance might not be contained near the frontier. In that event, the Army was ordered to fall back upon Matruh and organise the defences there with as many troops as possible at the earliest moment. On the frontier, 140 miles west of Matruh, only the 69th Infantry Brigade, and 7th British and 3rd Indian Motor Brigades were left to contact the hostile troops. At the same time preparations were being made to fight a decisive battle round Matruh. Owing to the shortage of field artillery and preponderance of infantry without adequate mount, the defences were organised in an unconventional manner. All surplus infantry was sent to the rear to prepare the Alamein position, while the rest of the force was arranged in battle groups, the purpose of which was to keep the defence mobile, the battle groups being moved where the danger was more acute. But before the defence was organised fully, Rommel had brushed aside the weak resistance by the advanced troops and by taking Sidi Barrani was soon on Matruh. The danger that the 69th Brigade might be cut off was great as also that Matruh would be isolated. General Auchinleck realised the immense gravity of the situation and took over the command of the Eighth Army directly.

The Matruh position was scarcely tenable and the perimeter ring could be easily pierced by the Axis armour owing to the weakness of the defenders in tanks. The 29th Indian Infantry Brigade which had been detailed to hold up Rommel's advance was much depleted in strength to offer determined resistance. The result was that Rommel's armour pierced through the vast perimeter, threatening to cut off the Indian Brigade and also to envelop the XIII Corps by throwing a wedge between it and the X Corps. The former was thus in great peril, and then it was decided to retreat to Fuka. This move could not succeed and it was with great difficulty, not without considerable damage to the 10th Indian Division, that the two Corps were able to fall back upon Alamein. The Axis troops were only 15 miles from that line on 29 June. Thus it was that the Eighth Army was forced to retreat up to EI Alamein Line, which Auchinleck had decided to establish as his last line of defence.

The Alamein Line commanded a narrow defile and was flanked by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Qattara Depression and the Sand Sea, a vast stretch of untraversable desert, to the south. Between these two natural obstacles was a narrow passage, nearly forty miles across at its narrowest, which could be tackled only by a frontal attack. This small stretch was in its turn covered by ridges and hillocks in the centre which admitted of being turned into strong defensive positions. Other features scattered about also could be made to offer obstacles to the advance of the attacking force. This line was being prepared for some time but when Auchinleck ordered the Eighth Army to fall back upon it on 29 June, it was scarcely in a fit position to stop the Axis advance. On 29 June, he assigned the southern half to XIII Corps and the northern to XXX Corps. The gap between the two was to be filled up by the remnants of the armour and mobile battle groups. But the hazard was great and the way to the Nile was exposed. However, the Delta Force was then putting up another line of defence, though no effective progress had been made in that direction; and X Corps was sent to man that position.

General Rommel, did not allow the Eighth Army any respite and attacked the Alamein position, which if broken must have laid bare the road to Alexandria. In the first attack the Indian troops of the 5th Indian Division suffered losses but still delayed the Axis advance for many hours. The second attack northwards was also contained. In the month of July, Auchinleck mounted six counter-attacks but all failed to make any deep impression on Rommel's army. It was clear to the British Commander that offensive operations would not succeed and therefore he decided to hold on to El Alamein, and reinforce his strength. The next three months were a period of stalemate which enabled the Alamein Line to be developed in depth and the army being strengthened. Rommel failed to pierce it, and possibly because of his losses which were not negligible and the preoccupation of the German armies in Russia, which made it difficult for him to gain fresh strength, he held on to his positions without forcing a decision on that spot. The British fortress was strong for it could not be outflanked and Rommel had not sufficient strength to break it in a frontal attack. Thus the battle hung on till winter. Meanwhile General Auchinleck was changed and his place was taken by General Alexander and the Eighth Army had a new commander in the person of General Montgomery.

Before General Auchinleck relinquished the command, considerable progress had been made in strengthening the El Alamein position and building up the necessary reserves. The 44th Division had come from the United Kingdom and was under training

near Cairo. Similarly the 8th and 10th Armoured Divisions were rearming themselves with American medium tanks and training. More and more equipment was also being received from Great Britain and the United States. But all these were bound to take some time to fully materialise, and the earliest that an offensive operation might be launched was early winter. Meanwhile the Alamein Line was being given a depth by defence constructions. The basic element in this vital defensive zone contained in the triangle El Alamein, El Hammam and the Qattara Depression was the existence of three prominent ridges running east and west. The northern one ran along the coast, the central was known as Ruweisat Ridge and the southern one was the Alam el Halfa Ridge; and the three of them commanded the entire position and prevented intrusion eastwards. On these ridges strong points were sited, each having a garrison of two infantry battalions and one artillery regiment of 25-pounder guns. The three points were within artillery range and afforded good observation. Besides these, there were other tactical spots also demanding close watching. The main defensive zone was about thirty miles deep with tactical areas to its north and south. In the north the passage towards Burg el Arab was guarded by armoured troops and in the south the road from Siwa, along the southern edge of the Qattara Depression, was watched by the Sudan Defence Force. The main zone was covered by prepared defences which were based on the four main defended localities, El Alamein, Deir el Shein, Qaret el Abad and the Tapa Plateau, from north to south. But except for the first, the other three had been lost to the Axis forces, though that fact did not make any considerable difference in the defensiveness of the El Alamein position. The new line was compact and easy of defence, closed in as it was by mines, wires and weapon pits. The Eighth Army, under its new commander General Montgomery, consisting of the XIII and XXX Corps, comprised eight infantry and four armoured divisions as well as four independent brigades of which three were armoured formations. The Axis army had four German and nine Italian divisions and German Para Brigade.

The new command did not favour a defeatist strategy and had no patience with the preparations made in the rear for the withdrawal of the Eighth Army in case of failure. To General Alexander, all these amounted to the destruction of morale and dispersal of scanty fighting resources. Therefore he held to the principle "that no further withdrawal was contemplated and that we would fight the coming battle on the ground on which we stood." This decision was made known to the troops in the Directive issued on 19 August, wherein the Army Commander was instructed to "hold your present positions and on no account

allow the enemy to penetrate east of them." This decision made it possible to assign X Corps to the Eighth Army to join the El Alamein position rather than waste its energy on building up defences in the rear. General Montgomery infused a new spirit in his troops and introduced new principles in warfare, which without being novel, were yet applied on a large scale for the first time. By the end of August, the defences had not been completed but the Eighth Army was no longer weak and was enthused with a new spirit and immense confidence. It was poised for offensive operations, but initially it had to withstand a determined attack by Rommel's forces.

General Rommel began his attack on 30/31 August with the confidence of marching straight to Alexandria within two days. His path was contested at Alam el Halfa by XIII and XXX Corps of the Eighth Army. The attack was designed to wipe out the opposition at Alam el Halfa and then break the defence at Ruweisat Ridge and then moving north-east encircle and liquidate the Eighth Army. Montgomery watched the trend of developments for a day to be sure that the attack was no ruse to protect an advance southwards, and when he found that the Axis advance was real, he hurled his armour, and in a battle, waged over six days, discomfited the Axis troops which had to retreat. The battle of Alam el Halfa was a major success for General Montgomery and a victory for effective organisation and patient preparations. But this Axis attack had disorganised the arrangements for Allied offensive which had been planned for strategic and political reasons and which was the primary task of the Eighth Army.

The battle of Alam el Halfa had one consequence that the counter-offensive was postponed to 23 October 1942 when the next full moon was to be there. Mr. Churchill wanted it to be earlier so that before the American invasion of North Africa from the west began, the British forces might be halfway up the west. But military exigencies prevented the date being advanced. Preparations were made for the offensive and a 'Cover plan' was adopted as a camouflage to ensure secrecy and afford surprise. The Axis forces had remained in and near the El Alamein Line and the first task was to destroy them before advancing westwards. The plan adopted was a three-pronged move; in the north the XXX Corps was to open a way through the northern defences, by clearing two corridors through the minefields along which X Corps was to pass; and sit astride the Axis supply line. In the south the XIII Corps was to carry out two operations. General Montgomery decided to destroy the Axis infantry before fighting the armour, so as to deprive the latter of its bases and instruments of manoeuvrability. That was a departure from the conservative way of fighting; and an innovation which brought good dividends.

The air force and navy were to assist the army and thus a three dimensional plan was devised to eliminate Axis opposition in North Africa. The troops of General Rommel had been entrenched behind a deep minefield, which left a few channels for the hostile armour and troops to enter to be destroyed subsequently.

The Eighth Army began its offensive on 23 October as planned and the battle raged in all its intensity till 4 November. Two Indian Divisions, the 4th and 5th, were deeply involved in the fight and acquitted themselves most creditably in the struggle which was one of the most strenuous and decisive in the Second World War. By 4 November the Axis screen had been pierced just enough to allow the armoured divisions to pass through. This enabled the XXX Corps to be on the move. The battle of Alamein had been won and the last winning strokes were dealt by the 5th Indian Brigade. It had penetrated deep into the Axis anti-tank screen, and that enabled the armour to pass through with success. By that time the Axis forces had started withdrawing, but owing to the paucity of transport and the pressure of the Eighth Army, not all were successful in effecting the retreat. The Italian infantry, lacking motor transport, could not escape and had to surrender in large numbers. By 6 November, the Allies had taken 30,000 prisoners including 9 Generals. The Panzer divisions had been greatly mauled and other Axis formations had suffered losses correspondingly. The greatest loss was in tanks and artillery. Thus ended the famous Alamein battle which sealed the fate of the Axis in North Africa and paved the way for the invasion of Italy.

The success at Alamein was so complete that the next step contemplated was to extinguish all Axis resistance in North Africa and secure the Mediterranean route wholly for use by the British navy. The relief of Malta and the occupation of all the North African ports were the other objectives which followed from it. The immediate task for General Montgomery was, therefore, to intercept the retreating Italian and German forces and destroy them before they had moved away far from the battlefield where they had met with their major reverse. The long line of retreat admitted of being cut at two places, Fuka and Matruh, where effective bottlenecks were available. Hence the X Corps with some troops of the XXX Corps was commissioned to intercept the retreat there and destroy the Axis forces before they could slip into Libya and beyond to the west. The first action was to be in Fuka and then Matruh. The advance of the pursuing troops was fairly rapid. But bad weather prevented the armoured troops from gaining a decisive victory and General Rommel's army depleted and harassed, was to get across the first bottleneck, and presented the prospect of a long pursuit to the Eighth Army.

What was thus initiated as merely a measure for cutting the retreat took nearly six months to complete and ended in the final elimination of the Axis from North Africa. The failure to encircle the Axis at Matruh led to the advance to El Agheila next, where alone a chance of repeating the outflanking movement might present itself. Rommel gained time to fortify El Agheila and Agadabia on the route.

The Eighth Army occupied Benghazi which was abandoned by the Axis when pressed on 18 November 1942. The next stage was Agadabia where Rommel's resistance was slight and the place fell to the Allies on 21 November. The German General had decided to oppose the Eighth Army at El Agheila, a better position for defence. This place was almost a natural fortress, creating a bottleneck between the coast on one side, and untraversable salt marshes on the other, and was the main gateway into Tripolitania. It was the last German stand in Cyrenaica. General Montgomery did not consider an outflanking move adequate to bring victory; hence he decided on a three-fold attack which was to be mounted on 16 December. The Axis Command had, however, no wish to offer an all-out resistance there and, on 8 December, the decision was taken to evacuate the place. The retreat of the Italians without transport gave the hint of that measure, hence the date of attack was advanced to 14 December. Air operations began earlier and Rommel was compelled to leave on 15 December and break through gaps which had not been covered. Thus fell El Agheila to the Eighth Army and thereupon commenced further pursuit to Tripoli which fell on 23 January 1943. However, Tripoli was not the end of the matter for the Axis forces continued their withdrawal westwards. This was a handicap for the pursuers for their line of communication was in the process lengthened and might become tenuous. The port of Tripoli could not be worked immediately. Hence only one armoured division was sent in pursuit and that was soon on the border of Tunisia.

Tunisia was the last bastion of defence for the Germans to which they wished to cling with tenacity. Its main towns Enfidaville and Bizerta with its port facilities were valuable assets both for the Axis and the Allies, and it was natural, therefore, that Rommel should make utmost endeavours to deny them to his enemies. To prevent their access to these positions, he decided to hold on to Gabes where strong defences known as Mareth Line were put up. By 25 February, these defences had been prepared and then Rommel withdrew from Ben Gardane behind the Mareth Line. General Montgomery did not let the time pass without effort and he utilised the interval to secure the main approaches to it by taking the important road centres of Medenine

and Fom Tatahouine. The attack on Mareth Line itself was to **commence on 20 March for which plans were being made.** The preliminary step was the battle for Medenine which paved the way for the attack on Mareth Line which was carried out according to plan and the Axis compelled to withdraw with considerable loss on 27 March. Three German divisions moved to Wadi Akarit where they took their positions subsequently.

The next objective of the Eighth Army was Sfax which could be reached only through the Gabes Gap, one end of which was the Wadi Akarit. The Axis had utilised the natural defences to the best advantage. But the Eighth Army could not be deterred by obstacles and on 6 April, the 4th Indian Division penetrated the Axis defences and loosened the resistance to such an extent that General Montgomery could launch a major break-through. Despite stout resistance the attack succeeded in pushing back the Axis forces which fell on Enfidaville. The pursuit was continued and the next day one patrol of the 4th Indian Division met the Anglo-American forces moving eastwards from Morocco. Thus contact was made between the two armies between which the fast thinning forces of General Rommel were sandwiched. The next stages of pursuit of resistance were remarkable in the quick fall of Enfidaville and Tunis. At this stage the First Army and U.S. II Corps together with the Free French troops had appeared on the scene and the operations against Tunis and Bizerta were the joint endeavour of the Allied forces moving from east and west. Early in May both Tunis and Bizerta fell and General Von Arnim who had succeeded General Rommel in command was taken prisoner. Thus ended the campaign in Tunisia and, what had started as an encircling movement consequent on the successful counter-offensive at El Alamein, ended in the utter collapse of the Axis in Africa. About a quarter million of these troops laid down their arms and the amount of equipment which they left to the Allies was immense. The fighting was hard and bitter. The Indian troops, to the extent of two divisions and a little more, had taken a big share of the fighting and had acquitted themselves with glory. The 4th Indian Division had fought hard at El Alamein, as in the previous struggle, and in the pursuit its role was extremely creditable. The 5th Indian Division was in the thick of the fight. Both the sturdy divisions gained mention in despatches and their men won gallantry awards. Two Victoria Crosses were annexed by Lalbahadur Thapa and Chhelu Ram, respectively. General Alexander could with perfect confidence now say "that the Tunisian campaign is over. We are masters of the North African shores." The way was now clear for the invasion of Italy for the Mediterranean was once again an English preserve, and the route was free from Axis obstruction. By May 1943, Italian and

German offensives had been vanquished in Africa and the way cleared for their final defeat.

The invasion of North Africa by the Eighth Army and the final expulsion of German-Italian armed forces from that theatre synchronised with other Allied successes in the Russian and Pacific regions. The tide, it appeared, had turned and the problem was no longer of defending their territories and repulsing Axis onslaughts, but of planning to defeat the Nazis and contrive to bring disaster to them. Even before the final scene had closed in Africa, the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 was contemplating the next stages of offensive action in the Mediterranean regions and western Europe. The Russians had succeeded in stemming the tide of German aggression in the south, yet the danger had not passed off. In the winter campaign only, in January 1943, the Russians claimed to have captured no less than 91,000 Germans and to have destroyed another 100,000. To this Nazi loss in manpower might be added the mounting destruction and capture of equipment, arms, ammunition, and vehicles. In the west also, Hitler was getting a foretaste of ultimate defeat as his people were getting a constant and continuous pounding from the air. The retaliatory air raids organised in the United Kingdom soon developed into mass air attacks directed towards wanton destruction of industries, towns and even men in Germany. The weight of this aggressive rain of steel and explosives from the skies was immense, and though it did not succeed in altogether obliterating the signs of civilised life, and did not operate to eliminate Germany from the war immediately, yet it had the effect of shaking the nerves of the people which culminated in the loss of enthusiasm for the war and the will to fight.

Stalin was conscious of the weight of German attack and had no illusions about the Nazi potential to prosecute war. Despite the growing resistance in his land and the failure of the German arms to break it, Stalin knew that unless a significant diversion was provided in the west, Hitler would continue to hurl his mighty force against Soviet Russia which might totter under the blow. Hence from the beginning he had been clamouring for a second front to be opened. This demand became more and more vigorous and the successes which the Russians now registered made Stalin more emphatic in his pressure for opening the second front in France. Allied strategy was not averse to the course, and American opinion favoured attack on France across the English Channel. This Atlantic or French west coast invasion was accepted as the ultimate object of Anglo-American strategy and organisational steps were initiated to implement it. But it was clear to the planners that the opening of such a Second or Western

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Front which might draw away German armies from Russia and hasten Nazi defeat would be possible not before the spring of 1944. Greatest weight was placed on such a venture, and other plans such as defeating the Japanese were to be subordinate to the invasion on the French coast. Churchill, however, had other schemes and the success which came in Africa made him intent on the adoption of a Mediterranean strategy, on which he placed great reliance, both as a measure to fill the gap till the initiation of the Western Front as also a major objective of war independently.

Till the preparations for French invasion were completed, the Anglo-American Chiefs of Staff had before them three areas which might admit of immediate offensive operations. One was Southern France, the other was Greece and the third Sicily and Italy. All these were the corollaries of African victory, and involved the reopening of the passage of the Mediterranean. Churchill had shown his predilection to the last of these, namely the invasion of Italy, which he considered to be the 'soft under-belly' of Axis and which was practicable at this stage owing to the severe beating which Mussolini and his forces had received in Africa. The exit of Italy from the war, he argued, would bring Turkey with its forty-five divisions into the contest, reopen the Mediterranean to British shipping, promote effective assistance to the forces of resistance in Yugoslavia, pin down German forces which might otherwise be diverted to France and provide the airfields in Foggia for vigorous bombardment of Germany and Central Europe. In view of the advantages that might accrue from this course, he did not favour the invasion of Southern France and insisted on the invasion of Sicily to be followed by that of the mainland of Italy. Stalin was not quite happy with that, but in the absence of any immediate prospect of the invasion of the French coast, he concurred in it. The Americans were also persuaded to this course as an interim measure on the condition that the resources for the 'Overlord' would not be diverted to it. The Casablanca and the Washington and Quebec Conferences prepared the blueprint of the Italian invasion and commissioned the Anglo-American armies to take the campaign into Italy. There was initially some pressure for the invasion of Sardinia which had great strategic significance, both for a hop on to the northern plains of Italy and for a swoop upon the southern coast of France. But ultimately the decision was in favour of the invasion of Sicily as a preliminary to advance into the heel of Italy, its southern portion. The conquest of Sicily was to be exploited for undertaking operations subsequently which would eliminate Italy from the war and contain the maximum number of German divisions.







The invasion of Sicily was to be a joint Anglo-American venture. General Alexander was to be the overall commander and under him were to operate the American Seventh Army, commanded by General Patton, and the British Eighth Army under General Montgomery. The invasion was to be launched on the south-eastern coast, and two sectors were chosen for the landing of these two forces separately. The American target was the strip between Licata and Scoglitti, while the Eighth Army was to land between Syracuse and Pozzallo. The total Allied force amounted to nearly seven divisions. The Indian contingent was small in this operation as it consisted of only two battalions, both in a non-fighting role. The invasion of Sicily came on 10 July 1943, but it was preceded by heavy air raids and preliminary occupation of Italian island bases in the Mediterranean, namely Pantellaria and Lampedusa in June. The landing on the Sicilian beach by the two armies was achieved with complete tactical surprise and with a suddenness. The next task was to clear the island of the Axis force which amounted to two German and nine Italian divisions. The latter were demoralised and the German Panzer Divisions were unable to halt the Allied advance. Soon Syracuse was captured and within a fortnight the Axis troops had been pushed back into the north-east corner of the island where the Germans organised a strenuous rear-guard action to cover the evacuation of the Axis force across the Straits of Messina to the mainland. Sicily was completely occupied by the Allies by 17 August 1943.

Prior to the conquest of Sicily the American Chiefs of Staff had been rather lukewarm about the enterprise in Italy and did not want any slackening of efforts or diversion of forces and resources from the invasion of the north-west of France. But the success in this Italian island and its political reactions in Italy made them bold and convinced them of the utility of this southern thrust as an instrument of defeating Germany. The Sicilian venture made the Mediterranean sea passage absolutely safe, and the immense equipment and accumulating forces could easily be transported to the east or to the southern Europe. But most immediate consequence was the collapse of the Fascist regime in Italy. Mussolini resigned on 25 July and a new government was formed under Marshal Badoglio. The King had also come back into power and the two were inclined to fall into line with the popular sentiment of leaving the war and making peace with the Allies, to whom they were friendly. Mussolini was under arrest from which he was later rescued to meet not long afterwards his death as the victim of mob fury. On 8 September, the new Government signed the Armistice and thus Italy was out of the war. But it did not end fighting in that country which was then taken up solely by the Germans, who had strengthened the defence by bringing in more than twelve divisions there and organised delaying tactics.

to hold up the Anglo-American advance up the north as long as possible. Meanwhile there was a major change in Allied concept of war in Italy. Previous to the victory in Sicily the purpose of the Italian campaign was that of contributing to the success of the main invasion in France. At best it was a holding operation to draw the German forces from the Western Front. The Sicilian victory made General Eisenhower and the Chiefs of Staff convinced of the necessity for bolder action, and mainland operations in a big way were recommended as a prelude to the early conclusion of war. The earlier conservative plans were altered to organise an assault on Naples and to capture Rome. The Germans had also deployed eight divisions covering the vital points, Calabria, Naples and Rome. They had three divisions each in Calabria and Naples and two in the Rome area. In addition to these there were some divisions in the north, Genoa-Spezia area—to act as a reserve or to meet any Allied threat to the north.

General Alexander's plan initially was to have a three-fold attack, one against Naples by the Fifth American Army, which was to make an assault in the Gulf of Salerno and then capture Naples. The Eighth Army had to mount a double attack, one across the Straits of Messina, into Calabria, the toe of Italy, and the other against Toranto to seize that port for the build-up of the Eighth Army. The 8th Indian Division was to be a part of the force for this last venture. Thus the toe, the heel and the leg of Italy were to be occupied before moving upwards into the heart of the country and its northern plains. The attack in the southern extremity met with little resistance for Field-Marshal Kesselring had divined the motive of General Alexander and therefore reserved his powder for resisting the American attack on Naples. Early in September, the Fifth Army made the assault and was resisted violently. But the sturdy Americans stood their ground and meanwhile the XIII Corps of the Eighth Army, realising the danger to the Fifth Army, moved northwards and threatened the German left flank. This eased the situation and by 1 October, Naples had been occupied. Meanwhile in the 'heel', Toranto had been captured without opposition and soon Brindisi and Bari were taken, thus making Bari port available for use by the Allies. That was a considerable gain. The airfields of Foggia were secured on 27 September, enabling strategic bombing to be organised on a large scale. The first phase of the Italian campaign had come to fruition when October began. Field-Marshal Kesselring had retired to the Volturno and the Germans had evacuated Sardinia and Corsica, thus leaving these two strategic islands in the west to the Allies.

The campaign henceforth dragged on and assumed, in the words of General Wilson, the feature of "a slow, painful advance

through difficult terrain against a determined and resourceful enemy, skilled in the exploitation of natural obstacles by mines and demolitions." The physical configuration of Italy lent itself to such devices by the defence, and the invaders had a difficult task to perform in dislodging the defenders from the built-in positions and crossing rivers and streams, one after another, and turning the heights, or conquering them, of a high mountain which dominated the entire length of Italy, from north to south. Flank attacks were difficult to mount, both because of the very narrow strip between the highlands and the sea and the shortage of landing craft which might bring the Allied forces to the shores of Italy. Hence the character of the campaigns was mainly one of overcoming German resistance on the mountainous highland. Kesselring's objective in this was only to delay the Anglo-American advance, for he could not conceive, with his limited resources, the possibility of defeating the Allied forces and expelling them from Italy. The sea and air power which the latter commanded was a safeguard against their defeat, and the Germans were weak in these arms in Italy. In consequence, the Allies had no difficulty in pushing him back from his successive positions in Volturno, Trigno and on the Sangro, before meeting him on the Garigliano in what is known as the Gustav Line, where Kesselring organised a stiff resistance to prevent their reaching Rome, the main objective of the invaders. Meanwhile, General Eisenhower had planned to land an American force, his VIth Corps, in the Anzio-Nettuno area, and this manoeuvre was executed on 22 January, when the battle for the Garigliano position was at its height. The landing on the Anzio beach was designed to threaten the rear of Kesselring's position to force him to retreat from the Garigliano. But the invaders took to consolidating their position in the beach area which permitted the German commander to launch powerful counter-attacks and contain the force there. This held up the diversion and the Gustav Line was saved for some months. The failure of the Allies led to a series of operations whose objective was the possession of Cassino, the centre of defence fortifications.

The initial plan for the capture of Rome had comprised a three phased operation, one by the Eighth Army aimed at the capture of the lateral road from Pescara to Rome through Arezzano, the other by the Fifth Army to capture Frosinone and reach Rome from the south and the third was an amphibious operation, south of Rome directed on the Alban Hills. The last phase was dependent on the success of the first two. The Eighth Army, which included the Indian Divisions, had consequently launched its attack across the Sangro on 26 November 1943 and had advanced within a month up to a distance of twenty-five miles from Pescara, its objective. It met with stout German opposition and its further progress was halted for the time on the Ortono-Orsogna line, thus

marking the failure of this phase of operations. The Fifth Army also did not fare much better. Within ten days of its launching the attack on 1 December, it had taken the Monte Camino feature, but the "progress into the Liri Valley was slow, and it still required a break-through of the Mignano Defile before the way to Cassino would be clear." Thus on both ends of the Gustav Line, which the Germans had formed along the narrowest part of the waist of Italy between the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Seas, a distance of eighty miles, the two Allied Armies had failed to pierce the front and overcome Nazi resistance. This failure would react on the entire strategy of the Allied Powers, for, as Churchill rightly held, "it would be folly to allow the campaign in Italy to drag on and to face the supreme operations against Europe in the spring with the task in Italy half finished." The primary need of the moment, therefore, was to break the stalemate, capture Rome and move into the northern plains when the 'Overlord' was staged in Normandy. Hence he hurried the Anzio landing to operate as a stab in the back of Kesselring, but, as has been hinted earlier, this adventure did not achieve the desired result. Its companion operation and the core of the plan was to be the thrust towards Cassino by the Fifth Army, as a preliminary to the capture of Frosinone. Thus the further progress of the campaign in Italy and the prospect of early success there depended on the piercing of the Gustav Line, which barred the way to Rome, and was based on the Garigliano and the Rapido, with its key fortress Monte Cassino. The fate of Italian war hung on the fate of Cassino with its monastery on the height, and it was against this position that the Anglo-American armed strength was now directed. The Germans had fully appreciated the strategic value of the Gustav Line, and there they had fully strengthened their position.

The Fifth Army, it was planned, would make a frontal three pronged attack on the Gustav Line involving the crossing of the Rapido and the Garigliano. The month of January saw the initiation of the offensive and the first thrust was marked with success as well. But this initial success soon petered out and the way to Liri Valley was not opened, as Cassino commanded its entrance and the withering fire from the high feature made further advance a risky enterprise. The attention was then directed on Cassino, and for this operation the famous 4th Indian Division was also drawn from the Eighth Army to assist the Fifth Army. But no less than three assaults in which this Indian Division had an important role to play failed to defeat the German opposition in Cassino. The Monastery was bombed, the city was attacked, but nature and German preparations together with their dogged perseverance defied all the attempts of the Allied forces and the tall feature refused to bow to their will! "Cassino was as defiant as ever." It was a

monument of German tenacity, stubborn valour, and supreme confidence which could not be shaken by the Allied superiority in air, artillery and infantry. The 4th Indian Division and the New Zealand forces which fought alongside had proved their mettle, and if they did not succeed to dislodge the defenders, it was not for lack of vigour, initiative or bravery on their part. The annexing of a George Cross by Subedar Subramanyam was an index of self-sacrifice for the cause of the army as a whole. The appreciation of its commander of the work of the 4th Indian Division clearly expresses its contribution to the success of war. He wrote, "The Division has made the whole of my life worth living. It has shown me what my old battalion showed me, but on a huge scale in varied colours—courage, daring, devotion, utter endurance till death. May God bless them in all their supreme nobility and selflessness." It was a high tribute, well deserved.

The failure to capture Cassino led to a change of plan and General Alexander decided to make a direct approach to Rome by forcing the passage of the Liri Valley. It was a difficult enterprise but the risk had to be taken if the Italian debacle was to be resolved before the 'Overlord' began further north. For this bold adventure, it was decided to thin out on the Adriatic front and concentrate both the Fifth and the Eighth Armies in the western sector. In consequence, the 4th Indian Division, depleted and tired, was sent to the Adriatic coast, and instead the 8th Indian Division, which had played a prominent part in the earlier advance up the southern Italy, was brought to fight in Liri Valley, in what is known as the Spring Offensive. This Division met with continuous success after its remarkable crossing of the river Gari, on which it placed its first bridge. Next followed the capture of S. Angelo, Panacione and Pignalaro, which enabled the 8th Indian Division to have a firm front to the Liri. At this stage, the initial task of this division was over for it had broken the Gustav Line and made open the route for the breach of the Hitler Line and the pursuit of German forces to Rome. This Indian division also brought glory and prestige.

The next stages were the capture of Cassino, and the storming of the Hitler Line for the control of the Liri Valley. The 8th Indian Division was involved in this phase also and had a major role in the crossing of the Melfa and the Liri and the seizure of Monte S. Giovanni and Veroli which facilitated the capture of Guarcino and Frosinone, on the road to Rome. The two Allied Armies had between them crushed the German defences and the American Army was able to enter Rome on 4 June. This marked the end of an important phase in the Italian campaign just before the launching of the invasion of France. The Germans were forced to retire to the Gothic Line, up the north, to protect the northern

plains, but they might have met with disaster if some Allied divisions had not been diverted for the invasion of southern France simultaneously.

The fight in Italy was not brought to an end with the occupation of Rome. The struggle continued in both the sectors, the Adriatic and the western, the Indian divisions being prominently involved in the former where they helped to mount the advance north-eastwards. The summer offensive against the Gothic Line proved a "disappointing venture." However, on the Adriatic side, advance was made from Rimini towards Ravenna in which the Indian troops had a considerable share. The move towards Bologna by the Fifth Army had however not succeeded and during the winter much progress had not been made. In April 1945, operations were intensified and these synchronised with the unchecked advance of General Eisenhower's forces from the west towards Germany and the Russian forces from the east. The odds were against Germany and Kesselring's mighty efforts to halt the Allied advance on the Gothic Line were destined inevitably to end in disaster. Bologna was entered and soon the two Armies crossed the Po in strength. The Germans lost heavily in their resistance which was now showing signs of collapse. The Eighth Army occupied Padua, Venice and Treviso and advanced on Trieste and made contacts with the Yugoslav resistance forces. The Fifth Army reached Brenner and established contact with the American Seventh Army from Bavaria. Genoa and Turin were captured and the Allied forces were heading for France. This brought to an end the Italian campaign and the Germans surrendered unconditionally on 2 May 1945. Two days later they surrendered in Germany also and the war in Europe had terminated with the end of the two Dictators, Hitler and Mussolini.

The war in Africa and Italy had been fought to keep the Mediterranean open and to block the Axis way eastwards to launch an invasion of India. It was this logic which drew Indian forces to operate in this region and, though numerically the three Indian divisions were but a small proportion of the total force involved, their contribution in actual fighting was immense and their successes paved the path to the final triumph of the Allies. The defeat of Italy with the surrender of its navy made the Mediterranean safe for movement of supplies to the east, which had a tremendous impact on the war against the Japanese in Burma. The 4th, 5th, and 8th Indian Divisions won laurels in these theatres and earned a name for bravery and skill.

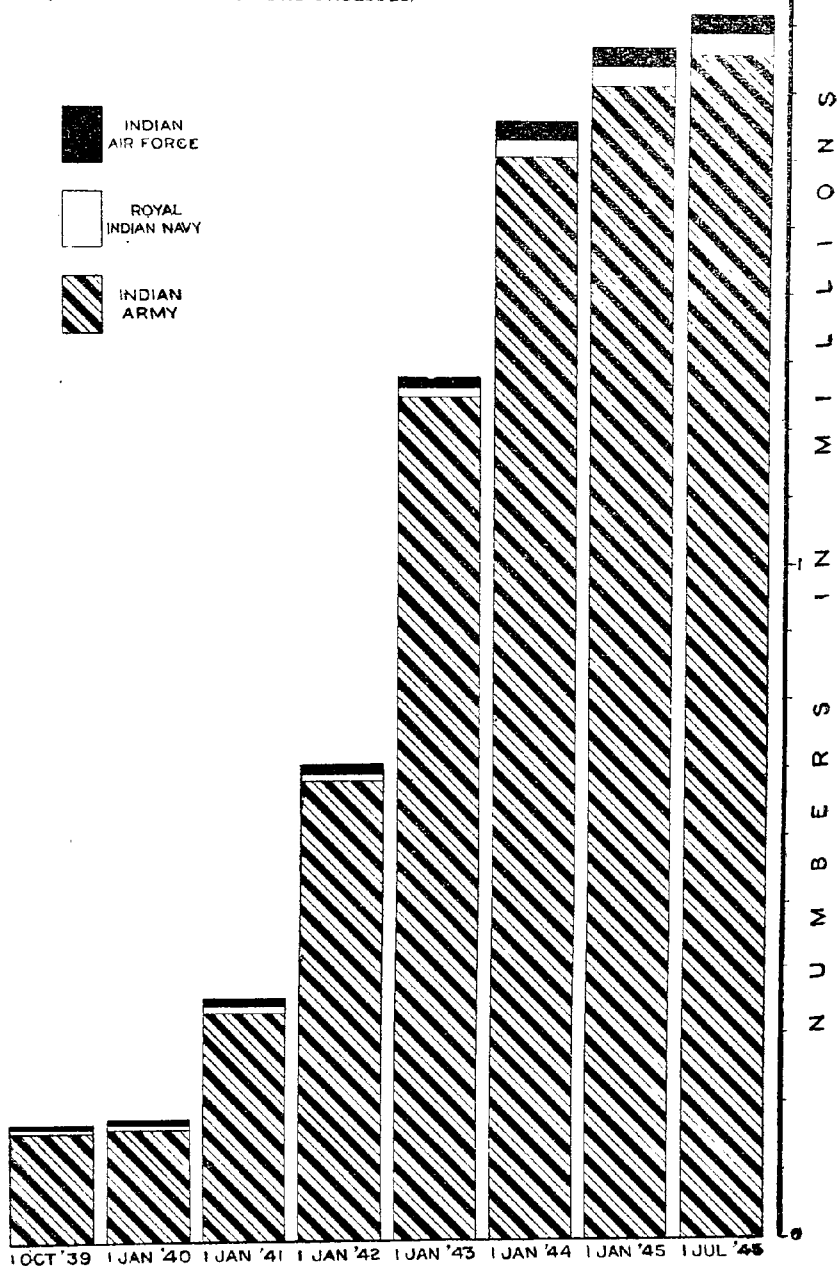


## INDIAN ARMED FORCES

IN

## WORLD WAR II

(CIVILIANS &amp; FOLLOWERS EXCLUDED)



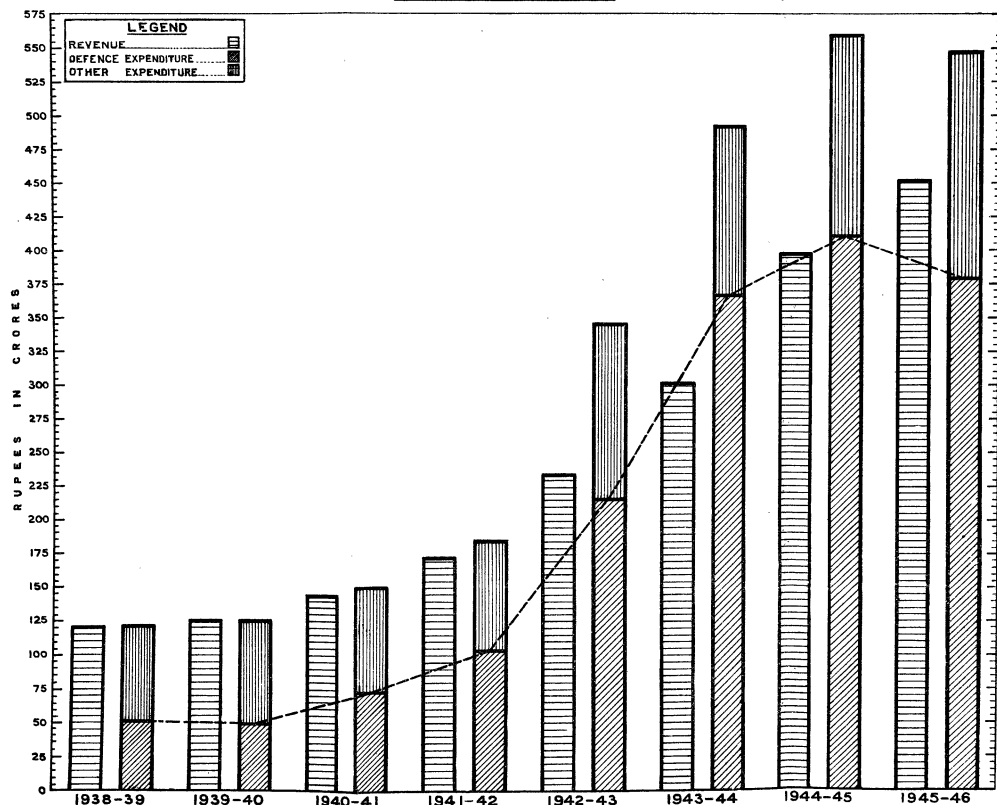
## CHAPTER XI

# India's Contribution to War

We have briefly described in the preceding pages the achievements of Indian Armed Forces in the various theatres of war. It is a glorious record of heroism and sacrifice in the cause of the United Nations. But the story will be incomplete without a description of the supreme efforts which were made within the country to assemble a huge man-power to fight the battles and to gear the entire economic activities of the nation to supply the immense and variegated requirements of the global war. We do not, however, imply that India shouldered this burden alone, for it was not the principal belligerent; but as a subsidiary participant, and that too against the wishes of the people, the contribution of India, both in men and material, was preponderant and out of proportion to its resources. The final output attained inconceivable limits judging from the condition of the army and the industrial machine in the country before the war, and in the circumstances of political subordination which had hindered development and limited its scope.

The strength of the Indian army before the war was disproportionate to its size and situation, and had been reduced considerably from the size it had attained during the First World War. Finance, imperial policy and political opinion in the country had restricted its numbers. Nationalist opinion in India was opposed to greater expenditure on defence till a responsible government was formed in the country. The Indian army was looked upon, with some justification, as almost an army of occupation in India and as an instrument of British Imperialism abroad. Moreover, India had also to bear the cost of the British troops stationed in the country, and it was plausibly argued that, since a British battalion costs much more than an Indian battalion, a far stronger armed force could be maintained in India on the existing defence budget if British battalions were replaced by Indian units. Till these things were done, Indian opinion did not support a larger Indian army. The British Government, on the other hand, could not have full trust in the Indian army and so did not want a really large Indian force. Moreover, the Indian forces were based on a system of voluntary recruitment which was, naturally, affected by the political atmosphere in the country. The politically conscious, well-educated Indian young men were neither eager to volunteer, nor were they welcomed in the armed forces. As a result, recruitment

# REVENUE, EXPENDITURE & DEFENCE EXPENDITURE OF THE GOVT. OF INDIA, DURING WORLD WAR II



in the early years was confined to certain small areas and communities. Even the equipment position was precarious, as India had remained industrially backward, unable to produce most of the munitions and technical equipment required in massive quantities in modern war. Munitions and stores had to be imported from Britain; and British preoccupation with her own rearmament, and the difficulties and dangers of transportation by sea during the war further restricted the expansion and equipment of the Indian forces. To sum up, political unrest in India restricted voluntary enlistment, Indian industrial weakness restrained re-equipment, and neither Indian nor British leaders favoured a really large Indian armed force.

Nevertheless, with the declaration of India's belligerency, expansion of the Indian army commenced. In the first two years it did not reach great heights for the demand was limited. Under Plan A, five infantry divisions and one additional infantry brigade were to be raised, and when four of these divisions were earmarked for service overseas, fresh troops were raised to replace them. In the last six months of 1940, nevertheless, no less than 35 new infantry battalions were raised. Thus, by the end of 1941, ten infantry divisions and one armoured division had been raised bringing the Indian army to a total strength of almost 900,000 men.

This, however, was far from the maximum effort that India was capable of. Even before the Japanese danger had fully revealed itself, the Government of India had offered to the British Government four or five more divisions for service overseas. These divisions included one armoured division, and involved the recruitment and training of about 600,000 men. These new divisions could be raised only, of course, if the necessary weapons and equipment were obtained from the United Kingdom. The supply position had definitely improved by the end of 1941, and the weapons were made available without much difficulty. However, the enlistment of educated Indians with the necessary technical aptitude restricted uninhibited expansion. The pre-war Indian army was not equipped with really modern weapons and was recruited almost entirely from the sturdy but uneducated peasantry of a few selected areas of the country. For a fresh enlargement of the Indian army, it was now necessary to override the earlier limitations. The new situation provided its solutions, and by the end of 1942, the Indian army had reached a total of over 1,546,468 men serving in India and overseas. Four fresh divisions had been raised during the year including one armoured division.

The expansion plan for 1943 called for an increase of 240,000 men in the Indian army, out of which one infantry division, one

airborne division and one heavy armoured brigade were to be formed. Apart from these fighting formations, a large number of non-divisional and line of communication units, field artillery, anti-tank and anti-aircraft regiments, engineer, signal, medical, ordnance, and supply and transport units were to be formed. At this stage, however, a shortage of equipment became evident, due mainly to the operation of German submarines in the Indian Ocean and the other intervening seas. The finding of sufficient numbers of educated and intelligent Indian young men suitable for technical training also became increasingly difficult. The political situation in India, which has already been noticed, also developed into a definitely restrictive factor in the recruitment of the requisite calibre of Indians. The competing demands of the three Services further aggravated the situation. However, by intensive efforts the expansion programme of 1943 was substantially achieved, and by the end of that year the Indian army totalled 1,829,350 men, apart from the auxiliary forces, the Indian States Forces, and the British units stationed in India.

The year also saw the implementation of several major policy decisions. A new command, called the South East Asia Command, was set up from 15 November 1943, with the task of conducting intensively the operations against the Japanese in Burma. This relieved the India Command of most of its operational responsibilities and enabled it to concentrate on the raising and training of the Indian forces. A special force also, called Long Range Penetration Group, was formed of hand-picked troops specially trained and equipped to operate well behind the Japanese line in Burma. In 1943 and 1944, this special force performed spectacular feats of endurance, bravery and ingenuity, though at a cost which many experienced commanders considered unduly high. In 1943 the Corps of Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and Indian Army Medical Corps were also formed.

The years 1944 and 1945 were a period of reorganisation and consolidation for the Indian army which had already reached very nearly its maximum strength.

Suitable Indian manpower for any further expansion was not easily available. However, the position of the United Nations had greatly improved. North Africa had been cleared of German and Italian troops, the Middle East was no longer threatened, and the Russian force had gone over to the counter-offensive. In the east also Japan was definitely on the defensive, and the United States forces were conquering island after island in their slow and relentless advance towards the Japanese homeland. As a result of all these factors both the volume and the purpose of recruitment in India were limited. The effort now was to maintain the Indian

army in full strength and highest efficiency and to replace all wastage, from whatever cause. Modernisation of the units and their reorganisation in the light of experience were actively pursued. The recruitment system was rationalized, and the needs of the three Services were fully co-ordinated. Scientific methods of selecting personnel were applied to the recruitment of officers. Difficulties which had arisen, by the use of Punjabi instructors for training recruits from South India, for example, were gradually overcome. On 1 October 1945, the total strength of the army in India and overseas was 2,644,323, including 240,613 men of the British army stationed in India.

The expansion of the Royal Indian Navy was equally remarkable. Before the war, it was a very small force with the role of providing local coastal defence and subsidiary co-operation with the Royal Navy of Britain, which was expected to deal with any major threat in the Indian Ocean also. The R.I.N. had in September 1939 only 114 commissioned officers and 1475 ratings. There were only a few small training establishments, and Naval Headquarters was manned by nearly 13 officers, with a civilian Chief Superintendent and a part-time Medical Officer.

On the outbreak of war, rapid expansion became necessary particularly to meet the mounting demand of personnel for mine-sweeping, contraband control and patrol work. These immediate needs were met by requisitioning merchant vessels and converting them into ships of war, which severely taxed the very limited resources of the R.I.N. dockyard. Training new men to become naval officers and ratings was a lengthy process, hence suitable sailors from the merchant ships were taken into the R.I.N. as "Hostilities Only" ratings. By the end of 1939, the R.I.N. had 314 officers and 2854 ratings. By the end of 1940, the strength had risen to 4342, including Boys and Apprentices but excluding officers and Warrant Officers. Several new training establishments with larger capacity were opened, such as H.M.I.S. *Bahadur* at Karachi and H.M.I.S. *Talwar* near Bombay.

The entry of Japan into the war in December 1941 added new burdens to the R.I.N.'s task. Convoys and evacuation of Indians from Burma required more ships, and the coasts of India had to be actively defended. Accordingly, recruitment for the R.I.N. was stepped up with the co-ordination of inter-Service recruiting, and up-country men also began to join the navy. Gradually, several new branches of the Service were created such as the Coastal Forces, the Landing Craft Wing and the Women's Royal Indian Naval Service. By the end of the war in 1945, the R.I.N. had undergone a transformation. Instead of five old sloops, a survey vessel, a patrol vessel and a steam trawler, and a strength

of only 1,708 men in September 1939, the R.I.N. had, by the end of the war, a borne strength of 27,651 men manning six modern sloops, four corvettes, twenty-one mine-sweepers and numerous auxiliary vessels.

The Indian Air Force was, before the war, a tiny service, with a total of some 200 officers and men manning three flights of No. 1 Squadron I.A.F. only. By 1945 the Service had nine squadrons. On 1 July 1945, its strength was 1,638 officers and 26,900 other Ranks. Modern training schools had been opened, and its exploits had won for this youngest service the title of "Royal". Most of this expansion took place between 1942 and 1944 when the Japanese danger in the east called for maximum effort and when the aircraft factories of Great Britain and the United States had got into their stride and provision of aircraft had become easier. The new I.A.F. squadrons were formed on the following dates :—

No. 2 Squadron	—	6 April 1941
No. 3        ,,	—	10 October 1941
No. 4        ,,	—	1 February 1942
No. 6        ,,	—	1 March 1943
No. 7        ,,	—	8 March 1943
No. 8        ,,	—	21 June 1943
No. 9        ,,	—	16 December 1943
No. 10       ,,	—	20 February 1944

But this did not represent the total Indian effort concerning the air force, which was intimately tied up with the British and American efforts in this particular field. The planes were not produced in India. Several thousand Indians were posted to R.A.F. units in India to ease the manpower shortage, while some R.A.F. veterans were posted to newly formed I.A.F. units to provide a leaven of experience. India had also to provide the numerous airfields and other facilities and services for the efficient functioning of scores of R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. squadrons based on India. At one time, there were 13,225 officers and 118,682 other ranks, all British, in the R.A.F. units operating in India. About the end of 1943, a total of 3,699 planes was based on India. Moreover, a total of 47,187 non-combatants, cadets, civilians and W.A.C(I)'s was raised to serve both the Indian and the Royal Air Force.

Thus during the war years, all classes and territories in India contributed, towards recruitment for the armed forces, a total number of 2,581,726 men. Of these the army absorbed 2,499,909 and the navy and air force had 28,972 and 52,845 men, respectively. It may be interesting to note that in the army the proportion of combatants to non-combatants enrolled was 1,876,999 to

622,910. Among the combatants recruitment was highest for the infantry, which came to 491,961 men. The armoured corps and artillery absorbed 104,117, the engineering services got 264,423 men and the signals had 63,397. The newly formed corps, IEME, secured only 17,225 men, but the Ordnance Corps received 103,695 men. The service corps, RIASC, had practically as large an intake as that of infantry, namely 466,240 men, of which 307,451 were absorbed by the newly established class of mechanised transport men. Other Arms received a total of 229,402 men while the medical corps had 114,719 men. It will be evident from these figures that technical services were also able to expand by recruiting a large number of technical personnel or personnel which could be moulded to their needs by training provided in those establishments. It is, however, true that the recruitment of technical personnel caused no small anxiety to the authorities and a greater expansion of such arms or services was limited by the restricted supply of suitable recruits for them. But when facilities were available for preliminary training and proper arrangements had been made for providing instruction in mechanical arts and crafts, the difficulty of filling the ranks had considerably diminished. Experience of the war had emphasised the importance of expanding the facilities for technical training in the country. The armed forces are fast becoming more and more mechanised, which makes it essential for the recruit to have a technical background to be a successful soldier. In war-times, when rapid reinforcement is essential, post-recruitment training, extending over a long term, will frustrate the very purpose of expansion. Hence it is absolutely necessary that during peace-years a network of such training establishments in the country provides technical instruction to young men, who may, in an emergency, be drawn into the armed forces for the security of their country.

Another problem which came to a head during World War II was the recruitment of officers. For long, the British authorities in India had denied, presumably for political reasons, recruitment of educated Indians to the officer-ranks in the Indian army. It was only at the end of the Great War (1914-1918) that a very limited number of Indians was provided training in the military colleges in the United Kingdom. Political pressure and increasing demand for Indianisation of the services had its effect on the armed forces also, and before 1939, the Indian Military Academy had been established to train officers for the army; recruitment for the air force and navy had commenced, and thereby a small nucleus of Indian officers had been formed, though mostly in lower ranks. The war accelerated the pace of Indianisation, for when all avenues of feeding the army in India with British officers had been closed, owing to the needs of the British army itself, extensive recruitment in India to the officer-ranks was resorted to. For the



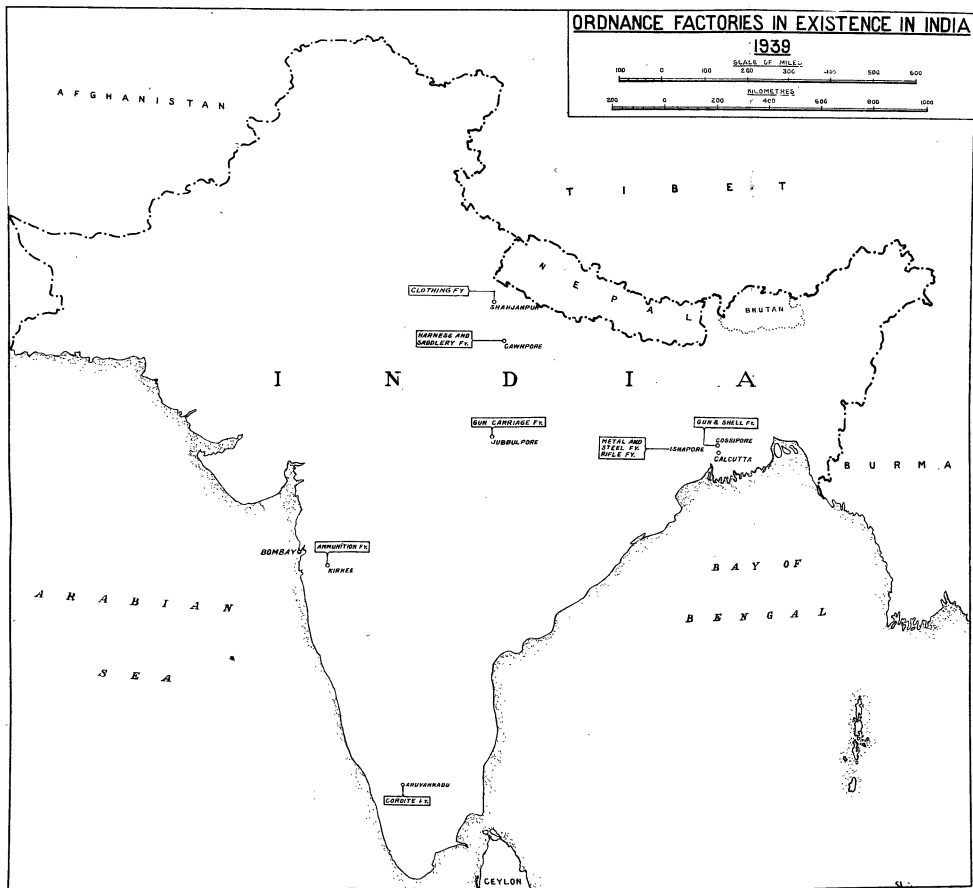
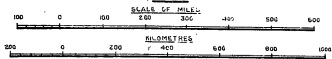
duration of the war, the period of training was reduced and all recruitment was made to the emergency commissions only. Political considerations, lack of appropriate training for military profession, non-attractive terms of service, in proportion to the risks involved, and social restraints influenced both the number and quality of officer-recruitment. Nonetheless, the expansion of the officer class in the army was phenomenal. From a figure of about 1,500 officers in 1939, the number rose to about 15,000 in 1945. This ten-fold increase would not portray the capacity of India to yield officer-element for the armed forces. It will not be incorrect to say that at the time neither patriotism nor interest had appealed to the educated youth of India to give of their best to the defence services. The best did not always come forward and that may account for considerable rejections and some wastage in training. However, unless the system of education was directed towards producing an adequate supply of officers for the armed forces, these services failed to get a growing volume of recruitment in an emergency. There was also need for adequate training establishments, which was to some extent remedied by opening schools for different Arms and Services during the war, so that at the close of it provision was available for further instruction within the country.

The Indian armed forces thus expanded and trained served in many regions and fought in various theatres and thereby contributed both to the defence of their country against invasion and the victory of the United Nations over Nazism and Fascism. They had thus helped the success of liberty and democracy in the world. In this process they had suffered losses and the casualties were numerous. The most severe loss, however, was in Malaya where nearly 70,000 officers and men were taken prisoners of war and had to undergo immense privations and inhuman cruelty. In Burma, with the South East Asia Command, the Indian troops played a prominent role. In this theatre as well as in others over the war years the Indian army's total casualties came to 175,000 officers and men of which the killed in action came to about 20,000. The infant air force and the navy, yet in their toddling stages, made immense effort to retrieve the situation in many phases of the war and gave brilliant account of themselves. Their losses, not so numerous, were still sizable.

The sudden inflation of the armed strength of India during the six years, sweeping away all artificial and irrational restrictions relating to class or race and stimulating the pace of Indianisation may appear to be a great achievement, a measure of the capacity of the Indian people to augment their war-potential in an emergency. It marked undoubtedly a remarkable stage, which falsified the fears of the tradition-bound English Officer who clung to the,

# ORDNANCE FACTORIES IN EXISTENCE IN INDIA

1939



politically inspired distinctions of martial and non-martial classes; and who did not hesitate to make pointed reference to the technological inexperience or incapacity of the Indian people. The Indian soldier, drawn from whatever region, falsified these fears and proved his mettle and stood alongside his companions in the field from the highly industrialised West. In the stress of war, all restraints on Indianisation of the officer ranks were cast to the winds, and its pace was so rapid that normally it might have taken half a century. The response to the call of the recruiter, however, was not great owing to the absence of political enthusiasm for the war or the patriotic efflux which draws the best men to fight for their country and freedom. The expansion of the armed forces was also limited by the inadequacy of equipment and the facilities for training, largely because of the industrial poverty of India and dependence on the United Kingdom for essential supplies. Yet the numbers raised attained the two and half million mark. This was a low figure judging from the mass requirements of modern war and the population of the country. This numerical strength pales into insignificance when compared with the forces employed by the many belligerent nations. Germany had 320 divisions outside the Reich in November 1943, Soviet Russia had raised 350 divisions to oppose the Germans, besides her vast eastern force. Modern warfare involves the hurling of huge masses of men and material in individual engagements. Total war demands the unswerving devotion to it of the whole population, whether in the field of battle or in the factories or in other occupations. Recruitment of men and manufacture of material both have to develop simultaneously, but before 1945, the necessary impulse was not there, hence the expansion, though immense, could not attain its full limits.

### **Supply & Industry**

Manpower is an important factor in war but without the full mobilisation of economic power of the nation, the sacrifices of the soldier may be a mere exercise in mass suicide. For 'no less than the morale of the troops, their grim determination to fight and their loyalty to the cause, are important the economic stability of the nation, its natural and industrial resources and capacity to gear the economy to an emergency and its adaptability to the mounting demands of the fighting men in the arena of battle. The sacrifices involved in the economic sphere are as important and as weighty as the readiness of the soldier to lay down his life for the defence of the territory and honour of his country.' Modern war, much more than those in the past ages, is pre-eminently a 'demonstration of financial stamina, industrial progress, richness of resources and growth of productivity of a nation or a group of them aligned together.' Victory in the last hundred years has been the result of economic superiority involving expansion of industry, commensurate with the requirements of the war and

keeping the civil population above want. In the Second World War also this principle found full verification.

The position of India was however different. Before the war its glaring economic weakness, largely owing to the vicissitudes of its political dependence, made it absolutely reliant on the United Kingdom for the maintenance of its armed forces, which had not been modernised and were equipped with archaic weapons of the past century. The economic potential and natural resources had not been exploited to develop armament industry or even the basic heavy industries which support the manufacture of arms and ammunition. The pace of industrialisation in the country since 1851 had been limited to the growth of textile industry, but even that was not adequate for the needs of the civil population. Small beginnings had been made in the production of steel, and the railway workshops were producing some of the requirements of railway transport. The Ordnance Factories produced some varieties of small arms, but they had no conception yet of automatic weapons, and artillery was not produced in the country. There was no automobile industry and as such the army had remained unmechanised, and the horse was its mainstay. Neither the government owned factories nor private industry had the means to prime itself to the requirements of a modern war. This situation was fully revealed by two enquiries which were held on the eve of the war. Both the Auchinleck Committee and the Chatfield Committee deplored the economic weakness of India for modernising the armed forces and made recommendations of vast import, aimed at the gradual development of armament industry. Neither of these Committees could, however, free itself from the incubus that, primarily and in the last resort, India will have to depend on the British industry in large measure for the fulfilment of its war requirements. They were limited from their terms of reference to consider the expansion of private industry in the context of war and military needs. Their recommendations were, therefore, halting, partial and inadequate, and the pace suggested was so slow that it would have taken decades before India might be even partially self-supporting, and the army could be modernised in parts only in not less than fifteen years. But time and tide wait for none. The war came before the Chatfield Plan, as the recommendations were termed, could be implemented. Its tempo was slow in the beginning but within two years it was apparent that India would have to rely on its own resources in a large way, that it will have to operate as a base for the conduct of operations in Asia. This involved expansion of industry in a haphazard manner and the utilisation of economic resources, unmindful of the consequences on civil population and irrespective of future effects. By 1943, India had to become one vast arsenal and gear its economy to feed and maintain considerably large

Indian, British, African, Chinese and American forces which were based on the country or fighting in South East Asia and Western Asia. The change was a major change which had comprehensive and far-reaching consequences on India's economy.

The conversion of India into a base implied that supplies should be collected and distributed to the various theatres of war, on the one hand, and, on the other, that it should develop as an important producing agent. The first involved the building up of a supply base and arsenal. In the early stages of the war, attention was directed to this step and efforts were made to bring about coordination with the British Empire. For this purpose two Committees were appointed, the Roger Mission or the British Ministry of Supply Mission and the Eastern Group Supply Council. The first was assembled after the fall of France to study the possibilities of developing and expanding the industrial resources of India. Its terms of reference were "to advise His Majesty's Government and the Government of India whether India's present output in the sphere of munitions and other stores required by the Forces can be expanded by the discovery and adaptation of existing suitable capacity and to what extent such capacity can, having regard to the general situation, usefully be supplemented for the purpose of the present war." The Mission found that the character of existing engineering industry in India had to be radically altered if the production were to be expanded considerably. Its recommendations entailed a total capital expenditure of £14½ millions, besides provision of machine tools and equipment from the United Kingdom. Their impact on the industrial development amounted to the establishment of five new ordnance factories, expansion programmes for the ten existing such factories, taking over and expansion of three railway workshops, and the establishment of a new factory for the manufacture of Bren and Besa guns. These recommendations would result in a sizable increase in the production of guns, carriages, rifles, small arms and ammunition, as well as in the production of bodies for motor vehicles. The Eastern Group Supply Council had for its objective the integration and rationalisation of the supply position among the eastern countries of the British Empire. This body acted as a clearing house for the demands and their allocation suitably and equitably. It made a survey of the production programme of the Government of India as well, and recommended nineteen new projects for implementation. These again had reference to the increase in the manufacture of certain arms and ammunition. It was wound up in 1943.

Up to the time that Japan entered the war and it became global in its magnitude, the planning and execution of the production programme was based on two fundamental premises: firstly, it was to be a part of the general British Empire program-

me and secondly, India was to serve as a supply depot for the campaigns in Western Asia. In 1942 and thereafter, India could not depend entirely on the supplies from the United Kingdom to maintain defence in the east owing to vast increase in requirements. Greater need was felt for depending on the United States henceforth, for which an approach was made at Washington. The American Government desired to send a Technical Mission to survey the industrial situation in India. The object outlined by the Grady Mission, as it was commonly called, was "to develop fully and as rapidly as possible the industrial resources of India as a supply base for the American armed forces in the Near and Far East." It recognised that the "military, naval and air strength" of the Russian, Australian and India-Burma-China front, "will be largely determined by the extent to which India, limited only by capacity and practicability, can become an important arsenal, producing the munitions essential to the prosecution of the war in this sector. There is, therefore, not only the problem of producing military equipment to protect India from invasion by Japan and perhaps Germany, but there is also the problem of supplying quickly and effectively certain war equipment for China, Burma and the Near East." The Mission examined the nature of industry in the country and found that the Indian workshops were producing a large variety of articles on a jobbing basis only and were not engaged in mass production of specialised items. Hence one of its major recommendations was for conversion to "assembly line" production, though it might involve a revolution in the character of Indian industry, to exploit to a maximum India's potentialities for war production. To develop "a programme of concentrated, rather than scattered, effort," during the war, it was necessary to have absolute state control in procurement of raw materials, rearrangement of machinery and plant and reallocation of priority. The Mission also recommended price control to minimise the prospect of unreasonable profits and to escape from the disaster of inflation. These were optimistic expectations which were not realised. Nevertheless, the review and recommendations of the Grady Mission were comprehensive and embraced various activities, like transport, railway operation, docking facilities, movement of petrol, munitions production, manufacture and repair of aeroplanes, quest for raw materials and supply of labour etc. The Mission had great expectations of the development of the military potential of India. It was their hope "that the decisive phase of the world struggle for democracy might be fought and won on Indian soil and that the extent to which India could aid the United Nations by supplying equipment and building up a formidable army of its own could determine the final outcome of the war. However, the Government of India had other views in the matter.

It is not our intention to describe in any detail the expansion of industrial production, which has been discussed in the volume entitled 'Indian War Economy' of this series. It may suffice here to mention that before the American Technical Mission's recommendations were implemented, progress had been made under the Chatfield and Roger Mission plans, and various categories of arms and ammunition and other essential military supplies were manufactured in India. The output of the ordnance factories was supplemented by the commissioning of some railway workshops and certain leading civil engineering firms and plants. A number of new plants were completed. Besides increase in production of guns and carriages, rifles and bayonets, gun ammunition, mortar bombs, Cordite, T.N.T., ammonium nitrate, small arms ammunition and cartridges and hand grenades, in which the expansion was manifold, some new items were also produced, such as Bren and Besa guns, howitzer and anti-aircraft high explosive ammunition, 25-pounder armour piercing shot and scientific and optic instruments. A few chemicals were also being produced. The Grady Mission's emphasis was on basic industries such as steel, aluminium, chemicals and machine tools, whose expansion alone would enable the armament production to attain full gear. The Government of India had not accepted its recommendations fully and had no intention of helping India to grow industrially independent of the United Kingdom. Hence the output in these industries did not proceed beyond a restricted limit. Nonetheless, progress was appreciable. The production of pig iron rose from 1,750,000 tons in 1938 to 2,000,000 tons in 1943 and that of steel from 750,000 tons to 1,250,000 tons in 1943-44. Also special alloy steel was developed as a result of research in India, and that helped the manufacture of railway rolling-stock, armour plates and various types of specialised ammunition, surgical instruments and many other ordnance requirements. There was enormous growth in the industries of tin plate, as also the production of bolts, nuts and rivets, steel casings, wire and pipes and tubes. A quantity of 80,000 tons of tin plate was produced in 1944. The output in the other items was not great but it marked considerable advance on the pre-war production and diminished the volume of imports. Alongside steel production, there was encouragement afforded to the non-ferrous metal production also. Besides copper, impetus was provided to the production of aluminium, antimony and lead, though the figures of output in these did not exceed a few hundred tons. But very useful beginning had been made and necessary manufacturing plants were set up. Many aluminium concerns were floated and started work. The other non-ferrous metal manufactures which developed during the war were wire, sheet and strip, rods and bars, lead pipes and sheets, tubes, electroplating etc. But the most important industry which was taken up was that of machine tools, which was actively encouraged

by the Government of India, and by 1944 the production had come to about 340 per month. In 1945 the total output was 11,000. Small tools were produced in much larger quantities and came to nearly 40 millions. The position of chemicals was not very bright but the production of sulphuric acid, potassium nitrate, and many other fine chemicals, besides coal-tar and ammonia was pushed forth, so that it attained a threefold level, as compared to the pre-war period. Among other items manufactured for the use of the armed forces, mention may be made here of clothing, parachute, harness and footwear production. The eight Ordnance Clothing Factories supplied over four hundred million tailored items. These consumed 1,062,000,000 yards of textile material, besides huge quantities of thread, buttons etc. which were produced in the country. Cloth and silk required were produced by the textile industry which was private owned. Parachute making was a new industry and, starting in 1942 with 29,000, it went up to 1,941,260 in 1944. The saddlery and harness requirements were largely met by the Government Factory at Cawnpore where the production had gone up by twenty times, but soon trade had to be exploited to cope with the demand. The total output came to nearly 60 million rupees. For footwear, private industry was requisitioned and the output of many firms was conscripted for the use of the armed forces. The total value of goods produced for the war was more than 22 crores of rupees, and about 22 million units.

It will be apparent from the brief review of production during the war that India's industrial output had reached impressive dimensions and in every item the progress was manifold. Clothing, parachutes, harness and saddlery, footwear and tentage, all these requirements were increasingly produced. Production of canning, hydrogenation and food preservation industries grew as also a host of others. Almost an industrial revolution had come about as a consequence of the machines and technical know-how being made available from the United States and the United Kingdom. Profit-motive also led to the springing up of many new industries which might have taken long in normal times to grow. This profit incentive led to the working of the existing industries to the utmost capacity without the renovation of plant. The targets were thereby fulfilled, but the ultimate effect on private industry was not wholesome in the long run. Nevertheless, the climate of change was clearly evident. Quantitatively this change may not be very marked, though the figures of production in many industries were quite high, but qualitatively this change was important. The industrial structure became wide-based and the lopsided development of the earlier period was to a great extent remedied. The war, in a way, provided the jumping-base for India's industrial progress in the period to come.





In the agricultural sphere, much improvement was not shown. A Grow More Food Campaign was launched but apart from its propaganda value, it failed to substantially increase output. There was decrease in import of food owing to the Japanese occupation of Burma. The large demands of the armed forces and the unplanned procurement of agricultural supplies, mainly of cereals for feeding the troops, brought about dislocation of grain trade. The scheme of denial and scotched earth in Bengal, when panic seized the authorities under the apprehension of Japanese invasion, reduced production of food and the channels of its distribution which had its effect on the agriculturist in the eastern regions. The consequence was shortage of food supplies for civilian consumption, leading, on the one hand, to a terrible famine in Bengal which took a toll of nearly 1.5 million human lives, and, on the other, to an unprecedented rise in prices, causing hardship and misery to the civilian consumer all over the country. However, there was a silver lining to it in so far as the rise in prices helped the agriculturist to rehabilitate his economic position, and in consequence rural indebtedness declined considerably. Apart from foodgrains, there was shortage of other commodities also in the market, due to the fall in imports and the channelling of the indigenous industries to war purposes. Textile production was particularly diverted for the use of the armed forces, and so also were various other consumer goods, which had found an export market. The result was an increase in prices, short supplies and civilian hardship.

### FINANCE

This situation was further aggravated by war finance, which had the effect of creating inflation in the country with its influence on the range of prices. The Indo-British Financial Agreement of 1939 had imposed on India the liability to make payment in rupees for meeting expenditure on supplies on behalf of the United Kingdom in India and the east. Later an agreement was made with the United States, under the Lend-Lease Agreement, for financing the requirements of the United States forces in the South-East Asia theatre. Thus apart from maintaining her own forces, India had to keep supplied the Allied forces with local requirements. In substance, this enhanced India's responsibility for the expansion of industry, financing it and purchasing all stores and providing the local purchases of the Allied armies. Vast financing of war preparations followed. The result was currency expansion which necessarily affected the prices in the country, and they showed the tendency of rising spirally. Lack of consumer goods with the vast mass of paper money floating in the market, with a marked fall in its purchasing power, made for substantial increase in commodity prices and the misery of the people. The expansion of small scale industry and growth in employment had

created a new class of neo-rich, but the profits had not filtered down to the vast masses. Whatever gain was evident in the form of money was dissipated by the abnormal increase in prices which more than counter-balanced the increased earnings. Famine or near famine conditions were visible, and there was absolute dearth of clothing and other necessities of life for the common people which had serious political and social consequences.

But there was another side to the picture also. The financial arrangement with the United Kingdom and increasing exports of manufactured goods for war purposes, which were not required by corresponding imports, had the effect of increasing the Indian assets with the United Kingdom, termed as sterling balances. This development led to the repayment of sterling loans of the Government of India and the liquidation of India's national debt to Britain as well as a saving of more than 1,300 crores of rupees till 1945. This sterling balance created a condition of financial stability and was useful for the new Dominions which were created in 1947 in the take-off stage of their economy.

Drawing up the balance-sheet, we may say that the war in its economic consequences for India, on the asset side, gave spurt to industry, increased employment and added to financial solvency. The large sterling balances were a concrete evidence of the change. But on the liability side, the picture was none other than gloomy. The Government of India in 1945, outlined the position very clearly. They said, "Since September 1939, India has progressively taken more and more from her civil economy to meet defence requirements. The position for some years past has been that she has given up to these : (1) the whole of her mill production of footwear and leather wear, (2) the whole of her mill production of woollen textiles, (3) the whole of her organised output of timber, (4) nearly 75 per cent of her steel, (5) about 75 per cent of her cement and (6) over 1/6th of her mill production of cotton textiles in addition to a 600 million yards quota of exports. Movement of military personnel and stores has over-strained the transportation system; and the shortage of coal imposed severe restrictions upon indigenous production. In addition, during 1941-44 imports have shrunk and there has been a great shortage of consumer goods like kerosene, brassware (for domestic utensils) etc. This paucity of civil supplies has been accompanied by a vast expansion of Defence and Supply expenditure leading to a great increase in currency, purchasing power and prices. The large increase in the number of Europeans and Americans with greater purchasing power than the ordinary Indians has aggravated the difficulties of the situation. The hardship has been progressive in its intensity and the brunt of it has been on the poorer element of the population." The Finance Member of the Government of India, in 1946, pointed to the various economic conse-

quences of the war. He stated that India "has suffered in full measure, and in some directions in greater measure than others". Particularly "her industrial equipment has been worked to the very edge of a breakdown and there is large backlog of maintenance and replacement to be made good".

An objective estimate of the economic effects of war will not omit the unbearable sufferings of the poor and lower-middle classes. The war also introduced tremendous social changes, not always healthy which were bound to affect the future economy and social behaviour of the community. The war necessitated immense constructions of military accommodation, factories and airfields. It helped vast expansion of armed forces and great increase in military equipment. It involved industrial expansion and the growing exploitation of economic potential which might have set the foundation of stable economic development. But in this field, the growth was exigential and not directed at any fundamental construction of basic industries or rearing up a self-priming economy. Most of the new enterprises which had bubbled forth ebbed down with the end of the war, entailing huge unemployment. There was a perceptible setback in output, and the old established industries dwindled because of the over-straining of their machines. But these consequences became apparent later.

All this suffering and economic dislocation might have been set off by an emotional stimulus in the political field. But the situation till the close of the war did not reveal any symptoms of the ending of the stalemate. The wild reaction of the British authorities in India and the Conservative Government in the United Kingdom to the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, had left a trail of destruction, cruel persecution and indiscriminate reprisals on the people. The experience of 1942 had made people bitter and disaffection had aggravated. Though the basic principle of the Cripps' Proposals had not been withdrawn, the Government was in no mood to conciliate the nationalists or arrive at any accommodation with the Congress. On the contrary, its attitude was of unbending severity. The detention of the members of the Congress Working Committee and Mahatma Gandhi continued and the local leaders were kept in the jails. There was for some time no talk of political settlement. A wave of fear swept the country and, in the absence of their political leaders, the people were in a mood of sullenness and desperation, and demoralisation was fast setting in. It was in this situation that Mahatma Gandhi declared a fast unto death on the issue of Congress responsibility for violence in 1942. His resolve and his deteriorating condition in his state of weakness created natural anxiety for his life among the people, who were once again galvanised into activity and political life was astir again. Meetings and prayers were held all over the country and moderate political leaders were active in securing

his unconditional release and finding some basis for political settlement. When Mahatma Gandhi had recovered his health, he took up seriously the problem of solving the communal deadlock as a pre-condition of freedom and future political progress. The Muslim League had adopted the programme of the partition of the country by its demand for the creation of Pakistan, and would not countenance any settlement which did not provide a separate homeland for the Muslims. The unity of India, which was the basis of the Congress ideology, was in danger. Mahatma Gandhi met Mr. Jinnah, but no progress was made in the discussions and, at the beginning of 1945, when the end of the war was in sight, the communal tangle had remained unresolved. The British Government made no secret of their intention to abide by the promise of freedom after the war, but an agreement between the two communities or between the Congress and the Muslim League was a pre-requisite for any advance. Lord Wavell as Viceroy of India tried to break the stalemate in 1945 when he released the Congress Working Committee and convened a Conference in Simla, in the month of June, to iron out the differences between the two parties and arrive at some basis for the entry of the two conflicting elements into the government of the country, which might pave the way for the framing of the free constitution and undertake the post-war settlement and rehabilitation of economy. The Conference ended in failure owing to the differences in the fundamentals of the political philosophy of the two parties. Thus when war ended the political settlement was still a distant dream. Lord Wavell's endeavour was directed at maintaining the integrity of the country and arriving at a settlement in that context. But he had failed to achieve it.

This failure had enhanced bitterness in the country and disappointment coupled with economic suffering was fast producing a spirit of violence and desperation. The propaganda launched by the Indian National Army in South East Asia found avid listeners and had its effect on the psychology of the people. Communal propaganda was creating frenzy and aggravating hatred and developing tendencies of violence. The prospect of demobilisation of vast numbers and the disruption of a multitude of units of production were leading to unemployment and economic misery. The labouring classes were growing conscious and Trade Union movement was active in the industrial areas. All these were ominous signs and necessary consequences of the long war. The flush of freedom might have counter-balanced these evil effects but there was no ray of light on the horizon which might have enthused the people and filled them with hope. The result was that when the war ended, there was gloom and the shadows of conflict were fast darkening the prospect.

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